

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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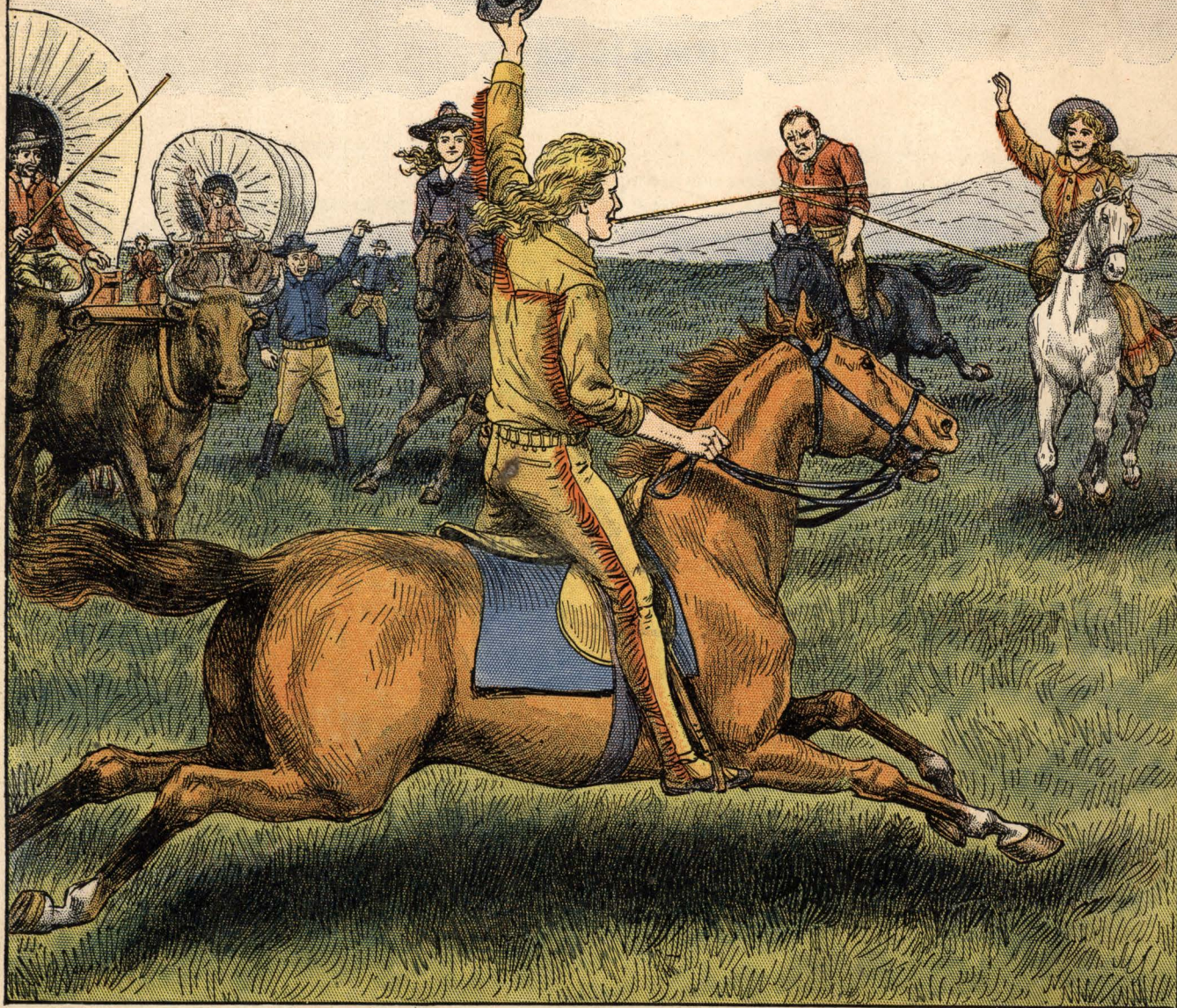
No. 262.

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 25, 1907.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST AS A PRAIRIE PILOT; OR, ARIETTA AND THE BRONCHO QUEEN.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



"We have got him, Wild!" cried Arietta, as Young Wild West came galloping up, waving his hat.
"I knew you two girls could do it," he answered. "You have roped the traitor nicely." The Broncho Queen seemed pleased

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YOUNG WILD WEST AS A PRAIRIE PILOT

OR,

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BY AN OLD SCOUT.

CHAPTER I.

THE TREACHEROUS GUIDE.

"I reckon there must be a big time over there," Young Wild West, the dashing young deadshot remarked, as he nodded in the direction of a ranch a couple of miles away, where there seemed to be a crowd gathered.

"I reckon so," Cheyenne Charlie, the ex-Government scout answered. "That must be a regular horse ranch, Wild. Jest see ther bronchos they got there! A sort of broncho picnic, I reckon."

The rest of the party, which included Jim Dart, a boy about the same age as our hero; Arietta Murdock, the charming golden-haired sweetheart of Young Wild West; Eloise Gardner, Dart's sweetheart; Anna, the wife of the scout, and two Chinese servants, nodded to what Charlie said and watched the scene before them with no little interest.

Young Wild West was riding across the northeastern part of New Mexico with his companions simply for the purpose of hunting up adventure and excitement.

At the time of which we write that part of the country was not settled to any degree, and danger from lawless whites and bad Indians lurked along the trails that ran over the mountains and across the rolling prairies.

Though but a mere boy, as far as years went, Young Wild West was the recognized champion deadshot of the West, and known by many as the "Prince of the Saddle," because of his wonderful riding and taming of the wild horses of the plains.

He was without a doubt the peer of all the scouts and deadshots of the West, and he had made a name for himself that many an older person would have been proud to own.

His two partners, Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart, always accompanied him on his trips into the wilds of the West, and generally the girls were included in the party.

They always spoke of the three as "girls," though Anna was a young woman somewhat past twenty, and married.

Of the three, Arietta was the only one who had been born and reared in the West, and she was without a peer at shooting with a revolver or rifle and riding a horse.

Anna and Eloise had learned to be quite proficient in these accomplishments, too, for they were just the ones to teach them.

The six were attired in fancy riding and hunting suits, and as they came to a halt and watched the scene they had come upon while emerging from a timber strip, they made a very pretty picture, indeed.

Young Wild West, on his splendid sorrel stallion, Spitfire, his long chestnut hair hanging over his shoulders, sat in the saddle with an ease and grace that was unsurpassed.

Near him was Arietta, mounted on a cream-colored broncho that was certainly a fine specimen of horseflesh.

The others were mounted upon the best horses that money could buy, even to the two Chinamen.

The latter two, by the way, looked so much alike that it was hard to distinguish which was which.

But as they were brothers, there was nothing very strange in this.

Wing Wah was the cook and Hop Wah was the man-of-all-work and entertainer for the party.

We say entertainer, for he was one of the cleverest of his race, though he appeared to be about as dumb and innocent as a "heathen Chinese" could possibly look.

But more about him later on.

The scene that Young Wild West and his friends were

gazing upon was certainly bound to attract the attention of any one passing that way.

Near a ranch house of the very old-fashioned type were gathered something like twenty men and fully a dozen women and children.

A small herd of bronchos were running around on the open prairie, and now and then a cowboy could be seen riding after them to prevent them from getting too far away from the house.

While our friends were watching the scene with no little interest they saw a female ride into view.

She was swinging a lariat, as though to rope one of the bronchos, and one glance at her told them that she was an expert.

"I reckon we'll ride over and find out just what is going on," observed Young Wild West. "Come on!"

Then away dashed the six, leaving the two Celestials in the rear, as they could not keep up, owing to the fact that they were leading a couple of loaded pack horses.

The sorrel stallion our hero rode could run like the wind, and his endurance was really wonderful.

He easily outstripped the others, but the young deadshot held him in, so his charming sweetheart might ride along at his side.

In a very few minutes they rode up to the house, and were just in time to see the female rider they had noticed from a distance rope a second broncho, throw it and get a halter on its head.

She was only a girl, and a very pretty one, too.

"I reckon she understands her business, all right," commented the young deadshot, nodding his approval at the feat that so few girls were able to perform.

"Why, Wild, you are not falling in love with the girl, just because she has done something that I can do very easily, are you?" queried his sweetheart, showing just the least bit of pique.

"Nonsense, Et!" was the laughing retort. "As if I could fall in love with any one, when I have you! Don't talk that way—I don't like it."

The girl laughed, a silvery ring in her voice.

"Oh! I was only fooling," she declared.

As they had been seen approaching, they were quickly surrounded by the people, who seemed to be having such a good time on the prairie.

Suddenly, an old man, with grizzled hair and beard, took off his hat, and, waving it over his head, shouted:

"Ho! Ho! I'll be everlastin'ly chawed by a bear if it ain't Young Wild West an' his pards! Give 'em a cheer—everybody!"

Our hero readily recognized the old man as Pete Darling, a ranchman he had once met in Santa Fe.

He had prevented him from being fleeced by a couple of card sharps, and the man had never forgot him for it.

The cheers were given with a will, and for the time being all interest in the sport was forgotten.

It did not take our friends long to get acquainted with the people gathered at the ranch, for they were nearly all thorough Westerners, and very democratic in their ways.

One after another was introduced, and at length came a rather handsome young man, with very dark hair and a

complexion that was rather swarthy, suggesting the Mexican type.

They learned that he was Tony Pedro, and that he had been hired to guide the party that was having such a good time across the prairie and mountains, into Southern Utah.

Pete Darling had sold his ranch, and three of his neighbors had done likewise, and now they were having a sort of farewell jubilee at Darling's old home.

They were to start in the morning on the long, tedious journey over the plains, in the hope of finding a sort of Mecca in what was purported to be the rich lands of Utah.

"Go ahead with your farewell jubilee," Wild said, after they had got pretty well acquainted with all hands. "I notice that you have got a girl here who is something fine at roping horses. I believe you introduced her as Belle, your daughter?"

"She's the Broncho Queen," spoke up a handsome young fellow of twenty-one, or thereabouts, nodding with pride at the girl, who stood modestly near her broncho.

Wild happened to catch the eye of the guide just then, and he could not help noticing that there was a peculiar look on his face.

"That fellow is no good, and he likes that girl!" was his inward comment.

"Go ahead an' show 'em what you kin do, Belle," said the girl's father. "Don't think 'cause Young Wild West is ther Prince of ther Saddle that you can't do as much as any gal kin. He's a boy, an' boys is s'posed ter be better at broncho-bustin' than gals, yer know."

"I have heard of Young Wild West," Belle retorted, smiling sweetly at the young deadshot. "Of course, I don't think I could do as well as he can. But," and she cast a look at the girls that was half defiant, "I reckon I can hold my own with anything that wears petticoats."

"You have already shown us that much," Arietta answered, taking it that the glance was meant for her, particularly.

Tossing her head and brushing back her long, brown hair, Belle Darling mounted her pony and rode out upon the prairie.

Half a mile away was a broncho that was having a good time at kicking and bucking, all by himself.

The steed was really a vicious stallion, and one that had to be handled with care.

The girl gave a sharp cry to her pony, and then away she dashed for the sportive broncho.

The animal did not start to run until she was within a few yards of him.

Then a lively chase ensued, the girl swinging her lariat with the precision of a veteran.

Gradually she let the rope out, and as she bore down upon the fleeing horse nearly the whole of it was making circles in the air.

"She's got ther fancy trick down all right," remarked Cheyenne Charlie, nodding his head approvingly.

"I reckon I'll go out an' see that no harm comes to ther gal," said Tony Pedro, the guide, just then.

He was mounted on a big, black horse that looked to be very powerful and swift.

"That galoot needs watching, boys," whispered our hero to his partners. "I don't like him."

"The same here," answered Jim Dart.

"Oh, I put him down as bein' no good ther minute I sot eyes on him," the scout declared.

"What's that yer said?" asked Pete Darling, the ranchman, who was near enough to catch part of what had been said. "Yer don't like ther looks of ther man we've hired ter pilot us across ther prairie?"

"No, to tell the truth, we don't," answered Wild, bluntly. "Do you know the fellow very well?"

"Never seen him till ther day afore yisterday. He was sent here by a friend of mine, who recommends him as bein' well acquainted with ther country we've got ter go over."

"Well, he might be all right; but I can't help thinking that he is not. Hello! What is that galoot up to now?"

The Broncho Queen had succeeded in lassoing the horse, and as she cleverly threw him and dismounted, Tony Pedro rode up and caught her with his right arm about the waist.

Then he quickly drew her upon his horse, and, waving his hat defiantly at the crowd in front of the ranch house, rode off for the timber our friends had emerged from a short time before.

"Great Jupiter!" cried Ranchman Darling. "Ther galoot has kidnapped Belle right afore our eyes! An' he's got a horse there that nobody kin catch! Oh! ther scoundrel! I'll fill him with lead on sight!"

But Young Wild West did not stop to hear any more.

He made a leap for gallant Spitfire and was in the saddle as quick as a flash.

"I'll catch him, Pete Darling!" he exclaimed. "I'll fetch the Broncho Queen back, and don't forget it!"

"Yer can't do it, I'm afraid," answered the old man, as he ran about, excitedly. "He's got ther fastest horse ever seen in these parts."

"But Young Wild West has got a faster one," spoke up Arietta, as she watched her dashing young lover riding to the rescue of the Broncho Queen.

CHAPTER II.

WILD RESCUES THE BRONCHO QUEEN.

Young Wild West certainly meant to run down the daring villain, who had so brazenly captured the ranchman's daughter.

He patted his noble horse on the neck and exclaimed:

"Let yourself go, Spitfire! You have got a hard one to catch, if what they say is true."

The stallion responded by quickening his pace, and, like a comet, the dashing Young Prince of the Saddle sailed over the prairie.

Tony Pedro, the treacherous guide, had a good quarter of a mile the start of him, but that made no difference to our hero.

The black horse might be big and powerful, but Spit-

fire had never yet quite met his match, and that made the boy confident of overhauling him.

Wild had his rifle to depend upon as a last resort, but he did not want to shoot at the villain unless he had to.

"I won't run the chance of hitting the girl," he muttered, as he dashed on. "If I can't do any better when I get within a hundred yards I'll try a shot. But it will have to be at the scoundrel's head, and that means death to him. If I should shoot at his body the bullet might kill the girl, too. No! I guess I'll take him alive with my rope."

Having come to this conclusion, he settled down for a long chase.

He knew it was going to be a long chase, for he had not gained a yard so far, and he knew it.

It was a question of which horse would tire first.

The black horse bore a double burden, and that handicapped him somewhat, though Pedro was not a heavy man, by any means.

The combined weight of the two might have been two hundred and thirty-five pounds, but no more.

The villain soon reached the timber, and as the horse with its double burden disappeared from view the Broncho Queen uttered a scream for help.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!" answered Wild, more to encourage her than anything else.

He looked around and found that not only were Charlie and Jim in pursuit, but the girls and all the cowboys as well.

But he knew they could not catch up with him.

Waving his hat to them, he bent forward over the sorrel's neck and spoke to him again.

Then it was that the noble steed made the dirt fly under his hoofs!

"Now I am gaining," thought the dashing young dead-shot. "I'll get him before he gets five miles away."

Up to the timber he dashed, and, taking the trail that ran through it, he never slackened the breakneck pace.

It was but a short distance across the timber belt.

As Wild reached the edge on the other side he gave a nod of satisfaction.

He had gained nearly a hundred yards, which showed that Pedro must have slackened his pace while going through the woods.

The villain was looking back when the sorrel burst from the line of green trees and came dashing over the short grass of the level prairie.

Wild noticed that he gave a start, and immediately tried to get his horse to a faster gait.

Tony Pedro had no doubt awakened to the fact that his was not the only fast horse in that section of the country.

"After him, Spitfire, old boy!" called out the boy, as he let the reins go slack.

There was no danger of the sorrel slipping; he was too sure-footed for that.

With his neck stretched out almost straight, he went on, gradually increasing his speed, for the noble animal was now getting warmed up to it.

Wild was elated, for he saw that he was gaining rapidly now.

There was a long, level stretch of prairie ahead, with not a tree or bush in sight.

About three miles had been covered, and Spitfire had gained at least three hundred yards on the black horse.

To make it all the worse for the daring abductor, the girl now began putting up a desperate fight.

While it did no good, as far as she getting the best of him was concerned, it certainly retarded the progress of the horse.

Wild could now see that the Broncho Queen had a rope around her body that pinned her arms to her sides.

Pedro must have performed the trick the moment he seized her.

He was holding her about the waist with his left arm, while his right hand held the reins and guided the horse.

Like an avenging Nemesis, the sorrel stallion swooped down upon the laboring black horse, which was now going in plunges.

If the rascally guide had not had the girl to interfere with him he might have led Young Wild West a much longer chase.

But, as it was, he was already beaten, and when he looked back and saw the young deadshot gaining so rapidly he realized it.

Suddenly he let go the bridle rein and then a revolver appeared in his hand.

Crack!

The sharp report rang out, and our hero heard the hum of the bullet.

But the distance was too far to make a revolver shot effective.

"He thinks he'll scare me, I guess," the boy thought, as he kept right on. "Just wait till I get within a hundred yards of him! I'll be there in less than five minutes now!"

He was right, for Spitfire seemed to have caught up a still faster gait, and, like a meteor, he swept down upon the scoundrel.

Crack!

Pedro fired again.

This time his bullet came dangerously close.

Wild brought his rifle to his shoulder.

He did not want to hit the man, but he thought he had better let him know how straight he could shoot.

"Here goes your hat, you scoundrel!" he called out.

Then he took a quick aim and pulled the trigger.

Crang!

Pedro made a grab for his hat, but he was too late.

The bullet from our hero's rifle had pierced the crown and knocked it from his head.

"I've got you, you sneaking coyote!" Wild called out. "If you fire again at me I'll put the next bullet through your head! I mean what I say!"

The man's swarthy complexion quickly changed to one of deep pallor.

Wild could see it from where he was.

"Let me alone!" he cried. "The girl wants to go with me. This is only an elopement."

Then the Broncho Queen screamed out:

"No—no! Save me, Young Wild West!"

"I'll save you!" was the reply. "Just keep cool. I am

going to shoot the villain pretty soon. Try and land on your feet when he let's go of you!"

But this was only a ruse on the part of our hero.

He did not intend to shoot the man, for he had made up his mind to take him back to the ranch a prisoner.

Pedro did not relinquish his grasp upon the girl.

He was now holding both her and himself down close to the horse's neck.

His right hand grasped the bridle rein and he was doing his best to get his horse to a faster gait.

Young Wild West saw his chance.

Quickly swinging his rifle over his shoulder, he got his lariat ready.

Closer and closer he came to the black horse.

Pedro was not inclined to look back now.

Evidently he thought that he could not divert a bit of attention from the horse he was trying to get to go faster.

It was a magnificent burst of speed that the sorrel stallion put himself to just then.

The animal seemed to realize that now was the time for his young master to act, and he wanted to help him.

Wild almost held his breath for a second when he saw how quickly he was overtaking the black horse.

He began swinging his lariat in a circle over his head.

When the proper moment arrived he let it go.

Whizz!

The rope flew through the air and circled about until the noose spread out.

Then a twitch brought it down over the heads of both the villain and his captive.

Wild quickly drew it taut, calling for his horse to stop at the same moment.

The next instant the black horse was galloping on, minus its double burden.

Tony Pedro let go his hold upon the Broncho Queen the instant he felt the rope flop around him.

Luckily the girl struck on her feet, but she could not keep her balance, for the rope held her as tightly as it did the villain, and she went rolling on the ground with him.

Young Wild West galloped to the spot, and, dismounting, placed a revolver close to the head of the villainous guide.

"I reckon I've got you," he said, in his cool and easy way. "Hold up your hands, or off goes the top of your head!"

Then with his left hand he jerked the noose loose.

Up went the man's hands as soon as he could get to a sitting posture.

"I didn't think there was a horse living that could catch me," he said, shaking his head, sadly. "That sorrel is a regular fiend."

"You are not the first galoot who has found that out," answered the young deadshot, as he assisted the girl to her feet and removed the rope from her.

CHAPTER III.

ARIETTA GROWS A BIT JEALOUS.

The Broncho Queen, though badly shaken up from her fall from the horse, was not bruised, and as she got upon her feet she turned to her gallant rescuer and exclaimed:

"Thank you, Young Wild West! I will never forget you for this!"

"Don't mention it, Miss Darling," Wild answered, not taking his eyes from her villainous abductor, whom he had covered with his revolver. "Your father said that there was not a horse in this part of the country that could catch the black, but I thought different. My Spitfire will never let a horse beat him in a race, whether it is for fun or for fair. It was for fair this time, and he won easily."

"He couldn't do it if I was alone in the saddle," spoke up the captured villain, who really seemed to feel worse for being beaten in the thrilling race than he did from being captured. "I may get the chance some time to show you that what I say is true."

"You may, but I doubt it," our hero answered, coolly. "I suppose you know what men of your stamp usually get in this part of the country, don't you?"

"Oh, I am not dead yet, Young Wild West!"

The villain actually smiled as he spoke, showing that he was possessed of great coolness and nerve.

"Miss Darling, please take his shooters from him," said Wild, not noticing the remark.

"Certainly, Mr. West."

She did so very quickly.

"Now, just stand here and cover him till I go and catch his horse. The black has stopped running, I see. If he attempts to get away, just break his leg with a bullet. I reckon you know how to do it, all right."

"Yes, I can shoot," was the reply. "I wouldn't hesitate to shoot him, either. The scoundrel! To think he would dare to abduct me in that way! He has been trying to make love to me ever since he came to the ranch, but I never thought he was bad enough to do what he just tried."

Wild saw that she was perfectly able to take care of the disarmed man, so he mounted his horse, coiled his lasso and started to catch the black horse.

The animal had not run more than a couple of hundred yards after being relieved of his double burden so suddenly, and he now stood cropping the rich grass.

Wild rode up and had no trouble in lassoing the horse, and then he rode back, leading him, just as Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart dashed up, with Arietta and the cowboys close behind.

Tony Pedro had not moved a foot, and when the cowboys acted as if they were going to show violence to him Wild called out:

"Easy, boys! Just tie his hands, and we'll take him back to the ranch!"

Pedro's hands were quickly tied behind him.

But the cowboys were not satisfied with this. They bound his ankles together, too, and then they flung him over the back of his horse, as though he was nothing more than a sack of potatoes.

"Oh!" exclaimed the Broncho Queen, running up and seizing both of Arietta's hands. "You should have seen how nicely Young Wild West rode up and overtook the villain. I think he is just grand, and so is his horse."

"That is right," Arietta retorted. "There is no one in the world who is the equal of Wild."

"I'll bet you are in love with him, by the way you talk,"

went on the Broncho Queen. "I don't see how a girl could help falling in love with such a dashing young fellow as he is. And so handsome, too!"

Arietta bit her lip.

She did not like to hear such words of praise from a girl, for she could not help thinking that Belle had an idea that she could win Wild's affections.

But she forced a smile, and just then Wild led his horse up and joined the two.

"I was just telling Miss Arietta how you rode up like the wind and caught me," said Belle, her eyes sparkling. "Wasn't it grand? I lost all fear when I saw you gaining so fast. What a noble horse you have, Mr. West!"

"Yes, I think a great deal of Spitfire," he replied. "But I guess we'll go back to the ranch now. I see the rest are ready."

Then he swung himself into the saddle and rode up to the side of his sweetheart, who was waiting for him.

But the Broncho Queen quickly took her place on the other side of him, and in this way they rode through the timber strip and back to the ranch.

Charlie and Jim, and Anna and Eloise joined them at the head of the procession before they got to the house, and all the talk was about the thrilling race to save the girl from her daring abductor.

When they dismounted in front of the house the cowboys brought the traitor up and looked at Pete Darling expectantly.

"Shall we hang him, boss?" one of the men asked.

Wild looked at the ranchman and shook his head in the negative.

"No," answered Darling, slowly. "I reckon we can't do that very well. I feel like fillin' him full of holes, though! But that wouldn't do, boys. It's too far ter take him where he kin be tried an' sent up, so I reckon we'd better give him ten minutes ter git out of sight. That's ther best way ter settle it. There ain't been no real harm done, yer know."

This did not please the majority of the men much.

They had been taught to take the law in their own hands in such cases, and if they had been allowed to have their way about it the chances are that it would have gone hard with the villain.

But after a little talk on the subject it was decided to give Tony Pedro his liberty.

"You jest hand over that advance money I give yer an' then see how quick yer can git away from here," said Pete Darling, as he paused in front of the prisoner. "We'll git ter our destination in Utah without any guide, I reckon. Untie him, boys."

The villain breathed a sigh of relief, for he had been very much worried as to what the outcome would be.

As soon as he was cut loose he placed his hand in his pocket and produced the money he had received as an advance payment for his services.

Handing it to the ranchman, he said:

"I couldn't help what I done. I fell in love with ther gal almost as soon as I seen her, an' when I found that she wouldn't have anything ter do with me, it only made me want her all ther worse. Goodbye!"

"Good riddance!" called out the Broncho Queen, con-

temptuously. "Light out, now! I want to see Young Wild West clip off a piece of your hat with a bullet."

Pedro took his hat, which some one had picked up on the way back, and, putting it on, mounted his horse.

"You are going to give me my shooters, ain't you?" he said.

"Give them to him," said Wild, nodding to the cowboy who had them in his possession.

This was done.

Then the villain looked at the Broncho Queen and smiled significantly, but made no remark to her.

Next he turned to our hero and exclaimed:

"I am going to try you in a race some time, Young Wild West. You just remember that, will you? I don't believe that sorrel can beat my horse in a fair an' square race."

"You take my advice and keep out of my sight," replied the boy. "I don't like you, Tony Pedro."

"Ha, ha, ha! You don't like me, eh? Well, I certainly have no love for you. Goodbye till we meet again!"

Then he put spurs to the black, and away he went for the timber.

"Hurry him along a little, won't you, Mr. West?" said Belle Darling, running up to Wild.

"All right; I will, then," and, placing his rifle to his shoulder, the boy took a quick aim and pulled the trigger.

Crang!

As the sharp report rang out Tony Pedro was seen to clap his hand to the side of his head, and then all plainly saw a piece of his hat drop to the ground.

The Broncho Queen clapped her hands with delight.

"That is it!" she cried. "What do you think of that, Arietta?"

"Oh, that is nothing for Wild to do," was the reply. "He can beat any one living at shooting, or riding, either. I know that for a certainty."

It was plain that Arietta did not much like the way the girl talked and acted in regard to her dashing young lover.

While she knew that Wild was not the kind to flirt, she could not help feeling a little jealous, just because she knew the girl had formed a strong liking for him.

But if she was a little jealous, she was not the only one there.

The handsome, young cowboy who had first mentioned the fact that Belle Darling was the "Broncho Queen" was certainly in love with her, and to see her showing so much attention to Young Wild West made him feel anything but pleased.

This young fellow bore the name of Ned Lake, and he certainly was worthy of the girl's love.

She had encouraged him in his attentions, too; but just now she seemed to have forgotten that he existed.

Arietta was not slow to notice this.

"The Broncho Queen is a flirt," she inwardly commented. "I don't like a flirt!"

It was about the middle of an afternoon in the fall of the year when our friends reached the ranch, where the jubilee was taking place, and they felt obliged to accept the invitation to stay there over night and see the wagon train start on its journey in the morning.

CHAPTER IV.

YOUNG WILD WEST BECOMES A PRAIRIE PILOT.

The man who had bought the ranch of Pete Darling had not yet arrived on the premises, but he had hired six of the boys who had been working there, and they were to look after things until he came.

Our friends were not long in finding out that there were just eighteen people going to Utah, including Darling and his wife and daughter.

Of these there were only seven men, the rest being women and children.

But four families were represented in the whole eighteen.

Ned Lake was the only one who had no relatives there. He had been working as a foreman for Darling for the past year, and he declared that he must go with him to the Mecca they hoped to find.

But it was more than likely that the bright eyes of the Broncho Queen had more attraction for him than any place they could possibly find.

After the abduction and rescue of the girl the bronchos were driven into the corral and then an old-fashioned dance took place.

One of the older men of the party had a violin, which he could play pretty well, and this furnished all the music that was needed.

Of course, our friends joined in the dance.

They were experts at that sort of thing, and after the first dance Wild was asked by Darling to dance with Belle.

He could not very well refuse, so Arietta at once accepted the invitation of Ned Lake, who seemed to know just who to ask about that time, and got in the same set.

The Broncho Queen was in great spirits, and she danced as she had never done before, so her mother declared.

But she had such a graceful partner that perhaps that had something to do with it.

The fun kept up until it was time for supper, and then the fiddler, having broken his last bass string, declared that they would have to quit, anyhow.

It was not until they had nearly finished eating the meal, which was quite an elaborate one, that Pete Darling asked our friends where they were bound.

"Nowhere in particular," Wild answered. "We are just looking for excitement and adventure."

"I wish you was goin' our way," the ranchman said, shaking his head. "I bet you could pilot us through over the prairie, all right."

"Why couldn't we do it, Wild?" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie. "We know ther way to ther Colorado River as well as any one, I reckon."

"Well, I see no reason why we shouldn't go, providing they want us to," our hero answered.

"Want yer to!" echoed Darling, jumping up and bringing his hand down upon the table with such force that the dishes danced. "Want yer ter pilot us over in Utah, eh? Great rattlesnakes! Jest say you'll do it, Young Wild West, an' I'll pay yer well fur it."

"We'll do it, and you won't pay us a cent," said Wild, smiling at him. "I'll be your prairie pilot, all right. There is no telling but that we may strike lots of excitement on the way, and that is what we are looking for, as I said a little while ago."

"Hooray!" shouted the pleased man, and the male members of the party joined him in giving a genuine cowboy yell, right at the table.

Arietta was the only one who did not look exactly pleased.

She noticed that Belle Darling appeared to be delighted, and that was probably the reason why.

But she did not say anything, of course.

"What is the matter, Et?" Wild said that night, as they got together on the porch. "You seem to be downhearted about something. Tell me what is troubling you."

"I wish you had not offered to pilot these people across the prairie, Wild," she answered, her face flushing.

"Why not, little one?" and the boy looked surprised.

"Well, I—I don't know exactly why, but——"

"Say, I'll bet I know what's the matter with you—you are getting jealous of the Broncho Queen! Now let me tell you something. That is nonsense! You ought to know that I only care for one girl, and that you are the one. Belle seems to think that she ought to treat me nice because I saved her to-day from that villainous guide. That is all there is to it. You don't see me acting spoony with her, do you?"

"No, but she acts very much as though she would like you to," the girl retorted, coming right out with it.

"Why, that young fellow called Ned Lake is engaged to her, so her father told me just before supper. You can bet she will marry him, too!"

"Well, she can, for all I care. I mean to show her that she is not the only girl who can rope a mustang before I get through."

"Good! I want you to. I understand that old man Darling is going to take along twenty of the unbroken horses. We can have a little fun now and then on the way, if nothing else turns up to keep us busy."

Arietta was in a much better frame of mind after having a talk with her sweetheart.

She believed in him, but at the same time she did not like it because the Broncho Queen was trying to be sweet on him.

The next morning the party got ready for the start.

Three old-fashioned prairie schooners had been fitted up and the axles well greased for a long trip of two hundred miles over the plains and mountains.

The goods and chattels of the four families were stowed away in the wagons, and, with four stout horses to each one, they set out, the cowboys, who were to remain on the ranch, giving them a rousing sendoff.

It was rather slow traveling for our friends, but they had not indulged in anything like it for some time, and they rather enjoyed it.

They kept at it pretty well until noon, and then a halt was made.

"I reckon we had better take a rest of two hours," Wild said to the ranchman, who was the acknowledged leader of the band of travelers. "We will gain more by giving the

horses all the rest we can. It is tough work pulling the heavy schooners over the prairie."

"Right yer are, Wild," replied Pete Darling. "You know your business all right."

During all this time Hop Wah, the clever Chinaman, had remained pretty quiet.

But after the halt was made, and they had eaten dinner, he began to get on very friendly terms with some of the men.

The old man who had played the fiddle for the dance was very joky with the Chinaman, and when he found that Hop could give him a pretty good answer every time he became more interested in him than ever.

"What's your right name, Hop?" he asked him.

"Me name Hop Wah; come from China, so be," was the reply. "Whatte you light name?"

"My name are Ben Hope."

"Me be'n hopee you likee um namee, allee samee," and the Celestial grinned.

"Ha, ha, ha! That's a good one! Say, what do you know, anyhow?"

"Me know how play um nicee lillee gamee dlaw pokee, so be."

"Yer do, eh?"

It so happened that old Ben Hope always had a sort of hankering for a little gambling now and then, and when he heard Hop say he could play draw poker he thought he had found a victim.

But Hope was not the only man in the crowd who liked to gamble with cards and dice.

That is a failing that a great many of the old plainsmen have.

It did not take him more than five minutes to get two others, who were eager to have a little game, and then the four went in the shade behind one of the wagons and were ready for business.

"I've got a deck of cards, but ther four of hearts is missin'," said one of them, as he took a very greasy pack of cards from his pocket.

"Me allee samee gottee plenty goodee cards," Hop answered, and so he had, for he was really a professional card sharp, and the man to beat him at draw poker had to get up very early in the morning, to use the expression.

"Them's what yer kin call cards," observed one of the men, shaking his head in a satisfied way. "How much money have yer got, Mister Heathen?"

Hop quickly drew a handful of gold and silver from one of his capacious pockets.

"Me allee samee got plenty," answered the Chinaman, smiling blandly.

"I'll tell yer what we'll do," said Ben Hope, winking at the other two. "We'll play a two-dollar freeze-out game, only jack pots. What do yer say, boys?"

"What limit?" asked one.

"Ten cent limit an' five ante."

"Lat velly nicee lillee gamee," Hop declared.

So it was settled that they would play it that way, and they got a wagon seat for a table and sat down around it.

It was not very long before there were some interested spectators, among whom were Wild and Charlie.

Our hero knew well that the clever Chinaman would swindle the men out of all the money they had, if they would play long enough with him.

But he decided to let the game go on, and at the finish make Hop give back his winnings.

"Only jackee pot, so be?" said Hop, as he carefully shuffled the cards.

"That's it!" the fiddler exclaimed.

"Allee light. No open um 'less um got pair of jacks or bettee."

He won the deal and then the game began.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO STRANGERS.

To look at Hop Wah just then, one would have thought he was a very innocent Celestial, who was ambitious to learn the great American game of draw poker, and that he was trying to make out that he knew something about it, just to get the privilege of playing with the "Melican" men.

The ante of five cents was put up, and then Hop allowed the man on his right to cut the cards, after which he proceeded to deal them around, one at a time, in accordance with the rules of the game.

The man next to the one who had put up the ante found himself the possessor of a pair of jacks, and he promptly opened it and bet the limit of ten cents.

It so happened that the others had pairs, so they came in, as a matter of course.

Hop also had a pair.

It was a pair of aces, too, and he knew he was going to have them before he saw them, for he had fixed the cards that way.

He also knew that he was going to get the other two aces on the draw.

That was a sure thing, as his sleight-of-hand abilities permitted him to get just what cards he wanted, when he was the dealer.

When it was some one else's deal he usually had the winning cards up his sleeve, or somewhere else, handy.

Each of the players drew three cards, and they each got a pair to correspond with the one they had.

Hop got his aces, and he had the best hand out, of course.

Then the betting went around, each man raising it the limit as it came his turn.

Four of a kind was a big hand, and as no one knew that any one held such a hand but himself, it was only natural that each should feel that he was a sure winner.

They kept it up with dogged determination until each had exhausted his two dollars.

Then it came a showdown.

"I reckon I'll scoop ther pot," said Ben Hope, as he showed four kings. "I wish it was a game of no limit, blamed if I don't! I'd clean you fellers out!"

"Thunder!" exclaimed one of the others, as he showed four queens. "I thought I had ther pot."

"And so did I," chimed in the other, as he showed his four jacks.

"You makee velly muchee mistakee, so be," remarked Hop, smiling blandly; and then he laid down his four aces. "Me havee takee in um pot, so be. Velly nicee lillee game fleeze-out, allee samee."

The Chinaman's victims looked at each other in silence for a moment.

"Boys," said Hope, "he said he knowed how ter play draw poker, didn't he?"

"He sartinly did say that," answered one of the men.

"Well—he does!"

The old fiddler got up as he spoke.

"I reckon you picked up the wrong man, gentlemen," said Young Wild West, smiling at them. "I may as well tell you that Hop is a professional card sharp. He could beat the man who invented cards, if he had the chance to play with him. Don't play any more with him. He will win all the money you have got if you do. Hop, now give them back their money."

"Allee light, Mislér Wild," Hop said, meekly.

Then he handed them each two dollars and walked away from the spot, shaking his head sadly.

None of the victims wanted to take back their money, but when Wild impressed it on their minds that what he told them was right they accepted it.

"It would only have served us right if he'd cleaned us out of all we had," said Hope. "We took him fur a green-horn, an' we expected ter win his money."

"Well, you can't always judge a man by the clothes he wears, you know," our hero remarked.

"No; nor by his pigtail, either," added Hope, with a chuckle.

A quiet rest followed, and when the time was up the party set out again over the prairie.

Toward the middle of the afternoon they saw timber ahead, and Young Wild West made up his mind that they would try and reach it before dark.

Their water supply was rather limited, and where there is timber there is apt to be water.

It was near sunset when they came to the timber, and then, much to the satisfaction of all hands, they found a brook.

The water in it was pure and cool, and that was all that was required.

"Now," said our hero, addressing the male members of the party, "I reckon we will fix things just as though we were expecting an attack from redskins or outlaws. There is nothing like being prepared, you know."

"That's right," answered Pete Darling, nodding his approval. "I agree with yer on that, Wild."

The wagons were drawn up in a semi-circle and the horses were left to graze on the luxuriant grass at the edge of the woods.

While the men were at work preparing for the night the children gathered wood and then fires were lighted and the women proceeded to cook the evening meal.

The pilgrims were happy in the anticipation of reaching the land they were heading for, as account of it had

been heard by them, and they all expected to do well there.

Young Wild West had not told them his opinion of it, but if he had it would have been that he did not think it one bit better than the place they had left.

But that made no difference.

The most of them had sold out, and they had money enough to stock up with when they got settled.

It was really the idea of Pete Darling to go prospecting when he reached what he considered was the gold-bearing region.

But he had not mentioned this to any one, and he did not intend to until what he thought was the proper time.

The evening meal was eaten and then it began to grow dark.

The horses, even to the unbroken bronchos, seemed to be perfectly contented, and it seemed hardly necessary to keep a watch on them.

Not long after dark the sounds made by horses approaching was heard, and in less than a minute later two strangers rode up to the camp.

They were cowboys, by the looks of them, though they appeared to be awfully dirty and unkempt.

Young Wild West sized them up quickly, as he always did strangers, and he came to the conclusion that there was something wrong about them.

There was a certain hunted look about them, which suggested the probability of their having committed some kind of a crime.

"Good evenin', people," said one of them, politely, as they drew rein and halted in the light of the big fire that had been left burning in the centre of the camp. "I reckon you've got a bite ter eat fur a couple of galoots like us, ain't yer? We seen your light here, an' we started fur it right away, 'cause we ain't had a square meal in about a week."

"I reckon yer kin have all yer want ter eat, strangers," Pete Darling replied, as he scanned them closely. "Where do yer hail from?"

"We belonged ter Dixon's ranch, which is about a hundred miles from here," the other fellow answered. "I say belonged, 'cause I don't s'pose we do now, fur Dixon is one of ther kind what don't like men what goes on a spree an' don't 'tend ter business. We was helpin' ter drive a big herd of cattle off ther railroad track, an' when he struck a ranch where they had whisky ter sell me an' Dave dropped behind an' got drunk. Then we got on ther wrong trail, 'cause it was in ther night time, an' we sorter got lost. My! But I'm putty hungry, I kin tell yer!"

"Well, blamed if yer don't look hungry," the ranchman declared. "Ther wimmen folks will git yer somethin' ter eat right away."

Darling believed that the man had told the truth in what he said, and he was ready to help them all he could.

But Wild did not believe what they said.

He had set them down as crooks the moment he got a square look at them, and he seldom made a mistake.

But there was one thing about it—and that was the two men certainly were very hungry.

They ate the food given them ravenously, and when

asked which they preferred, coffee or tea, they took both, each drinking two or three cups.

After they were through, and one of the men had furnished them with tobacco for their pipes, Wild started in to question them a little.

He learned that their names were Dave Mott and Rip Howard, but beyond what one of them had already told he could learn nothing.

As he expected, they asked permission to stay all night in the camp, and when Darling readily gave it, our hero made up his mind to keep a watch on them, or to see to it that some one did.

All this time the Broncho Queen had been rather quiet.

She had condescended to pay a little more attention to Ned Lake, and consequently the young cowboy foreman was made very happy.

Since Arietta had shown her jealousy Wild had paid little or no attention to what Belle had said to him, and she had probably understood.

The evening passed away, and soon it came time for the travelers to retire for the night.

The two strangers had not had much to say, and as soon as they found the rest were turning in they sought their blankets and went to sleep.

But they did not intend to sleep there all night, as will be seen.

CHAPTER VI.

TONY PEDRO MEETS AN OLD FRIEND.

When the bullet from Young Wild West's rifle cut a piece from his hat, his joy at getting off so easily was turned to fear, and his one desire just then was to get out of sight.

Now he breathed easier, for he felt that he was safe.

"Dandy, to-day is the first time you ever failed me," he said, speaking to his horse. "But I don't suppose it was altogether your fault. You had to carry two, and I was handicapped so I couldn't manage you right. But, old boy! I know there wasn't another horse there outside of Young Wild West's that could catch you. But I'll show that young galoot something before I am through with him!"

He patted the horse on the neck, which showed that he loved the animal, in spite of the fact that it had failed to get him away with his captive.

Once through the timber, the villain changed his course, and in a very few minutes he was riding in the direction he knew the wagon train would take the next morning.

Tony Pedro had not give up hopes of getting the Broncho Queen yet!

The scoundrel was really in love with the girl, and being of the type that will stoop very low in order to gain his point, he was but waiting for the chance to capture the girl again.

Then he, too, wanted to get square with the dashing boy, who had frustrated him.

He did not stop to think that if it had not been for the same boy he might have been lynched.

But Tony Pedro was not that kind.

He never gave any one credit for anything good; it was what was bad for him that he treasured up against them.

"I'll beat that sorrel in a square race with Dandy!" he exclaimed, under his breath. "Then I'll kill Young Wild West afterward! That's the programme. Now to get the chance to carry it out."

The villain rode on until darkness overtook him.

He had not seen a solitary thing that looked like civilization since he had left the ranch behind the strip of woods.

"It is rather tough to stop here on the open prairie all night," he thought. "But it won't be the first time I have done it. If I only had some grub with me it wouldn't be so bad. Well, I'll have to make the best of it, for I want to get a chance at Young Wild West. And I want Belle Darling. I reckon that is enough to make me put up with what they call privations."

He took the saddle from his horse and hobbled him, so he could not stray far, and then he sat down on his blanket.

It seemed that the villain was in luck, for he had not been there more than twenty minutes before he heard a horse coming that way.

Pedro sprang to his feet.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "I reckon I ain't ther only one out here on ther prairie in ther dark."

Then he saw the outlines of a horse and rider.

It was evident that the stranger had seen his horse, for he was riding slowly in the direction of the spot where it was grazing.

"How are yer, stranger?" Pedro called out, not caring much whether it was friend or foe.

"Ugh!" exclaimed the rider, bringing his mustang to a sudden halt.

"Hello, Injun! Got anything to eat with yer?"

It was an Indian, sure enough, and Pedro did not hesitate to step out to him.

"Tony Pedro! Me glad to see!" and with that the redskin dismounted and put out both hands.

"Why, if it ain't Jack Soldier Coat, I'll eat my hat!" cried the treacherous guide. "Jack, I'm mighty glad to meet you! Where are you bound?"

"Me have to get away from little town putty quick; me steal horse," said the Indian, nodding to his mount.

"Did you come far?"

"More than fifty miles, Tony."

The redskin was an Apache, and he could speak very good English.

But it happened that he and Tony Pedro had met before; and that they had been engaged in unlawful pursuits together, so it was only natural that they should be delighted to see each other.

"What you do here, Tony?" Jack Soldier Coat asked.

"Oh, I got chased away from a crowd I was going to pilot over into Utah, Jack. I fell in love with a nice girl, and I was fool enough to try and get away with her. But a boy they call Young Wild West had a mighty fast horse, and he caught me. They was goin' to hang me, but they changed their minds an' let me go. I ain't got a mouthful to eat, though."

"Me got grub; little water, too."

"Good! I'll never forget you, Jack, if you share a little of it with me. I'll put you in the way of getting hold of a whole lot of money, too, if you will stick to me."

"Me stick to Tony, you bet!"

The rascally redskin then attended to his horse, after which he produced a bag of provisions and a water jug, which was about half full.

The food was very coarse, but Tony was hungry and he made a hearty meal of it and swallowed it down with a draught of water that was almost lukewarm.

The Indian ate with him, and when they got through the repast all there was left was a couple of loaves of very hard corn bread and some salt.

"We get plenty game to-morrow," said Jack Soldier Coat. "The timber is over there."

"That's right, Jack. That is just the way I want to go. I want to get to some good hiding place and wait till the wagon train I was going to take through comes along. Then we will work a little strategy and steal the money the men have got. I suppose Young Wild West will be with them, too, though I never heard anything said about it. But it strikes me that way; an' he's ther galoot I want to lay low for catchin' me to-day."

"Me help. Me very good to steal when palefaces no see," the Indian assured him, meaning that he was a very good sneak thief.

"All right, Jack. My! but ain't I glad I met you! I couldn't have met a better one, if I had called out ther one I wanted to jine me. You stick to me, and you'll come out all right. If anybody comes along after the horse you stole you kin bet I'll stand by you, if I go under for it."

The villainous Apache smiled and looked pleased.

"Tony Pedro is a good friend," he said. "We stay together. Tony will help me and I will help Tony."

The two remained there until morning.

Then they at once left and headed for the northwest, where the timber lay.

They could see it ahead of them as the sun got a little way up, and then they knew they could reach it in less than two hours.

"We'll shoot somethin' for breakfast, Jack," said Tony. "Then we'll be all right. I reckon that will be a good place to wait for the wagon train, too."

"Woods a very good place," the Indian answered.

It was not more than an hour from the time they mounted when they came to the timber.

Here they found water, and then they started in to hunt for some game.

Both were what might be called good shots, and in less than half an hour they had bagged a jack rabbit and three partridges.

Then they quickly prepared the game for cooking and a fire was started.

"We can't eat it all now, though I'm mighty hungry," Tony declared. "It will come in good before the day is over, most likely, so we will take with us what we don't want now."

When the partridges and rabbit were cooked they ate

heartily, and then stowed the rest away in the bag the redskin had.

"Now I reckon we'll go on a little ways and find a good place to wait for the wagon train," said Tony.

"Better wait here," suggested the Indian, who seemed to think he was safe from pursuit. "This very good place. If the wagon train starts this morning it will be night when it gets here. They no come fast like us."

"That's so. I reckon you're right. Well, we will look around here and find about where they will put up when they get here. I suppose that is about the place, over there at the edge of the woods. There is the brook, and there is the grass for their horses. Well, I suppose we may as well stay right here and spend the biggest part of the day in hunting game. We will salt and smoke enough to last us two or three days, for in case we have to go on there is a mighty long stretch, where the game is as scarce as hen's teeth."

"That right, Tony," nodded the Apache.

They did remain there all day—or in the near vicinity, rather, and as night came on they had a good supply of provender on hand, in the way of venison, birds and rabbits.

It was just before dark when the Indian sighted the wagon train coming.

He ran back into the woods to the little gully they had chosen for their camping place and informed his villainous companion.

"Good!" exclaimed Tony. "We will watch where they will stop. It will be right at the edge of the woods, about three hundred yards from here, I'll bet!"

And so it was, too. The villainous guide hit it just right.

Tony Pedro was delighted.

"Now, if they don't guard their camp too strong, we'll do something to-night, Jack," he said.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VILLAINS GET TOGETHER.

Young Wild West was one of the first to turn in to get some sleep.

Cheyenne Charlie and two of the men belonging to the wagon train were going to do the first trick at watching the camp, so he felt perfectly at ease.

He knew that with either the scout or Jim Dart on guard things would be bound to be all right, in case of anything turning up.

But let us turn our attention to the men who had given their names as Dave Mott and Rip Howard.

Though they really were tired out, neither of them went to sleep.

They were nothing more than a pair of villains, and as well as they had been used by the travelers, they felt that they must rob them of what they could and steal off in the darkness.

When all was still in the camp, and they could hear the

regular breathing of some of the sleepers they grew restless and eager to ply their trade.

"Dave," said Howard, in a whisper, "we ought ter be able ter make a putty good haul here, hadn't we?"

"Yes," was the reply. "They appear ter be like a good-natured lot of innercents."

"Well, I tell yer what you do. You crawl out an' git ther horses ready, an' then see what you kin git in ther line of grub ter take along. There's two haunches of venison hanging over there, bein' smoked, an' yer kin git them all right. I'll look fur money."

There were two haunches of venison being smoked, all right.

A deer had been shot by one of the men just before dark, and they were getting the meat in condition to save for a time when they might not be able to get anything fresh.

The two unthankful men waited a while, and then they both crept away in the darkness.

It so happened that neither of the three watchers were looking that way just then.

But they could not hope to escape the vigilance of Cheyenne Charlie very long.

Dave Mott made straight for the place where the horses were, and he was stealthy enough to get them unloosened and ready to be mounted.

He even got them away from the rest and into the woods, for the guards were not expecting anything to happen so near them as that.

But Rip Howard was not so successful in doing his part of the game.

He had just reached the side of the sleeping leader of the emigrants, and was about to put his hand in his pockets, when a hand gripped him by the back of the neck and he was pulled backward.

"You measly coyote!" exclaimed a voice. "So you're a thief, are yer? Well, I reckon you'll hang from a limb afore you're many minutes older. Hey, there! Look out fur ther other galoot!"

One of the guards ran to the spot where the two men had been lying, and, of course, they found that there was no one there.

Charlie did not want to rouse the entire camp.

He thought they would be able to handle the two rascals quite easily.

But Howard was a very slippery fellow.

Suddenly he made a quick move and tore himself away from his captor, leaving his coat behind him.

Charlie stood for a second with the coat in his hand, and then he darted after the clever villain.

But he was just unlucky enough to catch his toe in a root, and down he went at full length.

Rip Howard dashed straight for the place where he knew his companion would have the horses.

He hit it just right, and as Dave Mott had already mounted, after hearing the voice of the scout, he started off through the woods the moment Howard got there.

"This way, Rip!" he exclaimed in a low tone of voice. "We've got ter ride fur our lives now."

His companion made no reply, but he got on the back of his horse with remarkable quickness, and away he went.

The two men were not particular just what way they went, so long as they could keep in the woods and out of the way of Young Wild West and his friends.

But they did not ride very far through the darkness before two forms confronted them and a muffled voice called out:

"Halt!"

There was an opening in the foliage just at that point, and Mott and Howard could see the two men quite distinctly.

They also caught the glimmer of something bright in the hands of one of them.

Realizing that they were covered, they promptly reined in their horses.

"Ugh! Where palefaces go so fast?" asked one of the men, as he caught Mott's horse by the bridle and kept him covered with a revolver at the same time.

"Not so loud, Jack!" said the other man. "We are pretty close to that camp, you know."

He had Howard covered, and he quickly got hold of his horse.

They were Tony Pedro and his Indian friend, Jack Soldier Coat, as the reader could guess without half trying.

The two rascally men had come straight to the camp of the villainous pair.

"If yer want ter rob us, go ahead," said Mott, who was the first to recover himself. "But hurry about it! We've jest been tryin' ter do somethin' in that line ourselves, an' we got catched an' had ter light out. You'd better look out, or Young Wild West an' his pards will be here in a jiffy. We ain't got three dollars between ther two of us!"

"That's right," spoke up Howard. "We're thieves ourselves, boys."

Tony lowered his revolver.

There was so much earnestness about them that he was forced to believe them.

"So you are thieves, are you?" he said, still speaking in a low voice. "Well, you can join us, then. Four can get along better than two, I reckon."

"But we don't want ter stay as close to that camp as all this," declared Mott. "Ther first thing yer know that feller they call Cheyenne Charlie will be here; an' there's no tellin' how many he'll have with him. If yer want us ter stay with yer jest git your horses an' come on a mile or so."

"Well, I reckon we'll go with yer, if there's any danger of us bein' found here. What do yer say, Jack?"

"Tony don't want Young Wild West to know that he is here," was the reply.

"That's right. Get the saddles on the horses. I'll watch these galoots to make sure that they are not playing us for fools."

"You'll find out that we're all right, pard," answered Howard. "But don't be ther means of lettin' us git catched by them people back there. They took us in an' give us a good supper; an' then we had ter try an' rob 'em. But it wouldn't work, an' here we are, very lucky ter git that far."

"Well, I reckon they wouldn't try ter catch yer in the dark, not if they knowed you had your horses."

"They couldn't help knowin' that we had 'em."

"Well, yer don't hear 'em comin', do yer?"

Howard admitted that he did not.

The fact was that Charlie had not tried to follow them into the woods after he heard the sounds of their horses' hoofs as they rode away into the darkness of the timber.

He quickly found out that no real harm had been done by the two rascals.

But the slight noise that had been made had aroused both Wild and Jim, whose ears were very susceptible to unusual sounds, whether they were asleep or awake.

When they found out that the two men had tried to rob some one in the camp, and then light out, they agreed with Charlie that it was best to let them go, and be on the lookout for them later on.

Meanwhile Jack Soldier Coat got the two horses ready, and also their few belongings.

Mott and Howard were on pins and needles, to use the expression, while they had to wait.

It was only a short time, but it seemed very long to them.

The four rode off together, the Indian leading and Tony fetching up the rear.

It was evident that the two latter were just the least bit suspicious of the pair that had joined them so suddenly.

When they had covered about two miles they reached a very thick part of the woods, where the foliage was so dense that the light from the stars could not penetrate.

"I reckon we'll stop here," said Tony, as he brought his horse to a halt. "Hold on, Jack. There's no use in going any further."

"That's right, Tony," was the redskin's reply. "This plenty good enough."

"Yes, this are good enough," observed Dave Mott. "Now, then, I reckon we'll git better acquainted with each other. You two fellers is robbers, or yer wouldn't have stopped us at their p'int of your shooters. Me an' my pards is jest ther same kind of stuff, so there yer are!"

"All right," answered Tony. "Just tell us your names."

This they did, and then they learned who the Indian and the white villain were.

After finding a suitable place to stop for the night they got it in shape, and then they talked in low tones for over an hour, and the result was that both pairs became satisfied that they could not have done better than to have met.

Mott and Howard were of the sneaking class of villains to be found in all parts of the world.

While they would put up a pretty stiff fight if cornered, they would sooner run away from bullets than face them.

They admitted all this, but Tony was satisfied.

"You help me an' Jack an' we'll all get hold of a big pile of money," he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

ARIETTA'S GREAT SHOOTING.

Our friends were up bright and early the next morning.

The sun came up like a great red ball, which gave promise of a hot day, with very little breeze.

Wild did not know exactly how far the timber extended, so he advised that the water barrels be filled, and that game should be shot in plenty to stock up for a two days' ride over the prairie, where there would be little to be found but very short grass.

His advice was acted upon, and when they emerged from the timber shortly after ten o'clock, and saw nothing but the rolling plain before them, the party was well supplied for the next two or three days.

As we have stated, it was rather slow work traveling with prairie schooners, but our friends had made up their minds to stick it out, and they tried to find something to pass the time.

Hop was induced to show some of his sleight-of-hand business every time they came to a halt to rest the horses, and he was very amusing to those who had never seen him do such things.

When noon came they halted and prepared to rest until two o'clock. Wild figured that they would reach the Utah line by noon the next day.

But the part that Pete Darling and his friends wanted to go to would necessitate another day and a half's journey at the least.

There was quite a patch of sagebrush off to the left of the spot they had halted at, and after dinner Arietta picked up her rifle and said:

"I have an idea that there is some game over there. I am going to try my luck. Sage hens are not bad eating, you know."

"Go ahead, Et," answered our hero.

"Can't we go, too, Arietta?" asked Anna, as she hastened to get a shotgun.

"Certainly. The more the better, for then we may be able to shoot enough for all hands to have a taste."

Eloise got her shotgun, too.

Then Belle Darling picked up her rifle.

"I may as well go, too," she said, smiling at Arietta. "I have often shot birds with my rifle."

"The four of us ought to get enough, if there are any there," was the reply.

Young Wild West's sweetheart meant to show the Broncho Queen that she would have to get a hustle on her if she wanted to keep up with her.

Arietta certainly was an expert at that particular kind of shooting.

"Now we will see something, I reckon," observed Pete Darling, as the four girls started for the sagebrush. "Belle will get her share of ther chickens, if there's any of 'em there, an' yer kin bet on that. Two of 'em has got shotguns, but that won't count much ag'in her, though."

"We will watch them from here, and count the birds we see drop," answered our hero, as he climbed up on the front of one of the wagons, where the ranchman was seated, smoking his pipe.

The girls had hardly reached the edge of the feeding grounds for the kind of birds they were looking for when a flock arose and flew straight away from them.

Arietta fired twice before either of the others pulled a trigger, and two sage hens were seen to drop.

Then Belle fired twice and one dropped.

At the same time Anna and Eloise let go with their double-barrelled shotguns, and five went down.

"That's eight that I know of," said Wild.

"An' Belle only got one," replied Darling, shrugging his shoulders. "She was a leetle bit slow, I reckon. But there's more birds there. Jest wait till she gits woke up."

Wild called Hop and Wing and told them to go out and pick up the fallen birds.

Meanwhile the girls continued on through the sagebrush.

They spread out about two hundred feet apart and held their guns in readiness.

It was not long before another flock got up.

Crang! Bang! Crang! Bang—bang!

The rifles and shotguns spoke and several of the birds were seen to drop.

But they were just a little too far away for Wild and the rest at the camp to count how many.

However, both our hero and Darling could not help seeing that Arietta was doing almost the entire work with the rifle.

Anna and Eloise were knocking two and three at a time with their shotguns, for the sage hens kept close together when they flew away, and it was easy to do it.

The four girls kept up the hunt for nearly an hour, the two Chinamen following along and gathering up the game.

When they finally came back to the camp there was a gleam of triumph in Arietta's blue eyes.

The Broncho Queen, on the other hand, looked disgusted.

"Well, I reckon we've got enough ter make all hands sick of chicken fur a while," remarked Pete Darling, looking at the game, as it was dropped to the ground.

"Count them up, Hop," said Wild.

The Celestial quickly did so.

"Allee samee, tleny-eight, so be," he said.

"I dropped seven of them," spoke up Arietta, looking at Wild and smiling.

"And I am sure I shot eleven," chimed in Anna. "I never had such luck at shooting birds before. I dropped three at one shot."

"Well, as far as I can tell, eight of them fell before me," Eloise said, modestly. "That is very good for me, I think. But they flew just right, and I couldn't help hitting them."

"That makes twenty-six that you three dropped, then," observed the Broncho Queen. "If there are only twenty-eight altogether, I could not have shot any more than two."

"What's ther matter with yer to-day, Belle?" her father asked. "I noticed that yer was wastin' considerable powder out there. You've gone an' let all ther rest beat yer."

"I didn't have the same luck that they did," was the retort.

"I'll admit that there was some luck about it," Arietta said, quietly. "But I never pull a trigger unless I am sure I have got my bird covered. I don't shoot and depend on luck to make the bullet strike the mark."

This was a cutting one, and Belle winced.

But she laughed good naturedly, however.

"Suppose we try shooting at something else?" she suggested. "Then we will see how much luck there is about it. There are a couple of empty tomato cans over there. Have some one to throw one of them up for you, and let's see how many times you can hit it before it strikes the ground."

"Very well," Arietta answered, quickly. "Wild, you throw it up for me."

"Certainly."

The young deadshot picked up one of the cans, which had been emptied of their contents a short time before, and got ready.

Arietta put some fresh cartridges in the magazine of her rifle, and then she called out that she was ready.

The girl was just in her element now.

She always liked to do fancy shooting, and she took delight in it on this occasion, because she felt sure that she could beat the Broncho Queen.

"Are you ready, Et?" asked Wild.

"Yes; throw up the can."

Up it went as high as the boy could throw it.

Arietta caught it before it got to its height and then she began firing rapidly.

Three times she pulled the trigger before the can touched the ground, and when Ned Lake ran and picked it up he could easily count three marks on it.

"That's what I call shootin' some!" he exclaimed. "Belle, you'll have ter git a hustle on yer ter come up ter that."

"Oh, I don't expect to come up to it," was the reply. "I never thought I was a champion shot. My best game is with the bronchos."

Everybody wanted to look at the can, and when they had satisfied themselves that the girl had not missed a shot they looked upon her with admiration.

Belle now got ready to try her luck.

"Will you throw up the can for me, Wild?" she asked, calling him by his nickname for the first time.

"Certainly," was the reply. "Just say when you are ready."

Arietta frowned slightly.

The Broncho Queen was looking straight at her, and she noticed it.

She smiled, as though she enjoyed it.

"Are you ready?" called out our hero.

"Yes. Let her go!"

Up went the tomato can, fully as high as the other had gone.

Belle fired three times in quick succession and then the can hit the ground.

Ned Lake ran and got it.

"Only two holes," said he, shaking his head in a disappointed way.

"Well, that is pretty good, anyhow," Belle answered, with a toss of her head. "There are not many of you men who can do as well as that."

"I reckon you're right on that," Lake retorted.

"You are a wonderful shot," observed the Broncho Queen, looking at Arietta and nodding to give emphasis to her words. "You have no doubt been taught by your

lover. I give you credit for beating me, and as it is only a friendly rivalry, I hope we will be just as good friends as ever. However, I would like to see you on a bucking broncho."

CHAPTER IX.

ARIETTA SURPRISES THE BRONCHO QUEEN.

Arietta smiled.

She could tell that the girl was sincere in what she said, so she laid aside her pique and replied:

"Of course we shall be just as good friends. I pride myself on being a good shot, and, as you say, I was taught by Wild. He knows all there is to be learned about shooting, I guess."

"There ain't no doubt about that!" exclaimed the Broncho Queen's father.

"How do you know that, Mr. Darling?" our hero asked. "You never saw me do anything in the line of shooting."

"I seen yer clip a piece from ther hat of Tony Pedro, while he was ridin' at full speed," was the reply. "An' I've heard a lot about you."

"Well, it wasn't anything much to do to clip a piece from that galoot's hat. A great many people could do that just as well as I did."

"Not sich an awful lot, either. I reckon there ain't none here what could do it—outside of you an' your pards, an' Arietta, I mean."

"Nonsense! Ned Lake could do it."

"I might do it, but I wouldn't want ter try it on a friend," spoke up the cowboy foreman, shrugging his shoulders.

"S'pose yer show us a little fancy shootin' while we're waitin'? We've got half an hour yet."

"Arietta wants to try to ride a buckner first, pop," spoke up Belle.

Arietta had not said that she did, but she now made up her mind to do it, anyhow.

"Fetch out the ugliest brute you have in the bunch," she said, quickly. "I guess I can manage him. It won't be the first time I have been on the back of a bucking cayuse."

The members of Darling's party were staggered when they heard this.

They had really thought that Belle was about the only girl in existence who would dare tackle an ugly buckner.

"I reckon you'd better try one that's been putty well broke," suggested Ned Lake.

"No! I want one that no one has been able to manage yet, or none at all," the girl answered, her blue eyes flashing. "I don't want to try to do something that any one can do; I want to show you that I am no tenderfoot in any sense of the word."

"That's the way to talk, Et!" exclaimed Young Wild West, looking with pride at his charming sweetheart. "If there is anything in the line of a bucking broncho in that bunch that you can't tame I'll do it myself!"

They all saw that the girl was in earnest now.

She was very cool and determined, and announced that she was ready to proceed.

Wild got his lariat.

"Show me the worst one you've got in the bunch," he said to Lake.

"Well, if yer want me to I reckon I kin do it," was the reply. "Yer see the bony buckskin over there?"

"Yes. Is he the worst one in the bunch?"

"He sartinly is. But if ther gal tries it she'll git hurt, jest as sure as you're alive!"

"Oh, I don't know about that! She has tried about the worst that we ever came across, and she never got hurt very badly yet. What do you think about that buckskin, Et?" and he turned to his sweetheart, inquiringly.

"Go ahead and catch him, Wild. And get him good and mad, too," was the reply.

The Broncho Queen looked interested.

She had never yet tackled that particular horse, knowing that he was a dangerous one.

And she liked to be called the Broncho Queen, too!

She began to think that she was not the only girl of the Wild West, all of a sudden.

"I wouldn't try that horse, Arietta," she said, after a pause.

"Why, not?" was the reply.

"You will get hurt. That buckskin is very vicious. He will not only buck and roll, but bite and kick as well. I wouldn't tackle him, if I were you."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Yes; I'll be honest with you—I am afraid of him."

"Then I'll try him, anyhow."

"All right. If you can ride him, so can I."

"That remains to be seen."

Arietta was as much elated now as though she had won a great victory."

She never once doubted but that she could manage the wild horse, and she wanted to get at it right away, for the sooner she brought the Broncho Queen down a peg or two the better she would like it.

Young Wild West had no fears as to the outcome, for he knew his charming sweetheart was not only an expert at the game, but was also full of grit.

He moved out toward the bunch of bronchos and soon got a chance to lasso the buckskin.

The beast showed that he was very vicious right from the start.

"Fetch the saddle and bridle, Charlie," called out Arietta to the scout.

"Right yer are, gal," was the reply.

Charlie was not a bit afraid but that she could manage to keep on the buckskin, and he was going to help all he could.

After no little trouble the broncho was saddled and bridled.

The whole crowd gathered around to witness the feat Arietta had promised to do.

The girl had no spurs, but she held a short whip in her hand as she approached to mount the vicious steed.

She was very cool, too, and Belle Darling looked at her with admiring eyes.

There was nothing of the jealous disposition about the

Broncho Queen; but she really had thought herself without a peer at tackling wild bronchos.

Ned Lake, her admirer, was dismayed at what he had already seen and heard.

It was he who had nicknamed his sweetheart the Broncho Queen, and to see her wrested of her laurels was something that was anything but pleasing to the young man.

Arietta watched her chance, and then, with a lightning-like move, she leaped into the saddle.

"Let him go!" she called out, sharply, and Wild and Charlie did so.

But the plucky girl already had her feet in the stirrups, and she was right there!

The buckskin started to run with her at first.

He covered about fifty yards at a breakneck pace and then began bucking for all he was worth.

But Arietta, her long, golden curls flying in the wind, answered to every move the vicious brute made, while the lookers-on clapped their hands and cheered.

Belle Darling stood as though spellbound.

Never had she seen any one more graceful in the saddle.

Arietta was alive to every move the broncho made, and when he got tired of bucking and tried to throw her over his head, she was right there, just the same.

For fully five minutes the steed kept it up, and then, finding it was useless to buck and kick any longer, he dropped to the ground and tried to roll her under him and crush her.

But Arietta did not mean to allow anything like this to happen.

She was out of the saddle in a jiffy, and waiting for the vicious brute to get up again.

He did not make a move in that direction soon enough to suit her, so she plied the whip on him.

Then the broncho bounded upward like a shot.

But the daring girl had hold of the saddle horn, and she swung upon his back with ease.

Some more bucking followed, but it was tame, compared to the first exhibition, and the result was that the broncho was soon galloping over the prairie, being guided whichever way the girl saw fit.

She kept at it until she had the brute conquered at every trick he knew, and then she rode him a couple of miles out at full speed.

When she came back a few minutes later the buckskin broncho was almost white with foam.

"Whoa!" she cried, sharply, and he came to a halt as quickly as any gentle horse would have done.

"There you are!" exclaimed Arietta, as she leaped lightly to the ground. "I don't call that broncho a bad one, after all."

But the treatment the steed had received would not make a lasting impression on him.

As soon as the saddle and bridle were taken from him he dashed away, kicking and snorting defiance again.

"Goin' ter try him, Belle?" asked the Broncho Queen's father.

"No, pop," was the reply. "Not to-day, anyhow. Arietta, I want to kiss you! You have shown me that it is not right for one to think they know it all. I was sure

that I was one who could not be equalled at that kind of work before I saw you do just what you did. I am not entitled to be called the Broncho Queen any longer."

"But you must keep the title, just the same," was the reply.

Then the two girls walked back to the camp, hand in hand.

"Three cheers fur Arietta!" shouted Pete Darling. "She's ther gamest gal what ever put foot in a stirrup! Hooray!"

The cheer that followed echoed over the plain.

CHAPTER X.

HOP WAH PLAYS THE PART OF A WHISKY THIEF.

A few minutes after Arietta had given her wonderful exhibition with the bucking broncho the prairie travelers got ready to set out again.

The draught horses were hitched to the wagons, the bronchos got on the move by the men assigned to take care of them, and then the rest mounted and were off.

The two Chinamen, with the pack horses, kept close to the wagons, while Young Wild West rode ahead, along with Pete Darling and his daughter.

Belle's mother chose to ride in one of the wagons.

The rest of the females in the party also kept to the wagons, they not caring to ride horseback, though there were plenty of horses for the purpose, if they wished to.

As the afternoon wore on they found themselves ascending a gradual rise, and the further they got up it the scarcer the grass became.

But they had been wise enough to stock up with sufficient fodder to last the horses that had to work a couple of days.

The wild bronchos could make out on almost anything, for if the grass was dried up they would eat the roots and thrive on it.

It was about five in the afternoon when they reached the top of the long slope, and then, looking downward, and to the northwest, they could discern a long blue line, which told them that a forest was there.

But they knew quite well that they could not hope to reach it that night.

In that clear atmosphere they could see quite a long distance, and thirty miles was by far too much to think about making before the sun went down.

They went on about ten miles, and then Wild considered that they had travelled enough for the day, so he called a halt and advised that they go into camp for the night.

All hands seemed glad to do this, for the sun had been very hot all day long, and they were pretty well tired out.

While preparations were being made for the evening meal, our hero took a walk to the top of a little hill and surveyed the scene in different directions.

He saw nothing that looked like life until he happened to turn his gaze almost due west.

Then he caught sight of four horsemen as they were in the act of disappearing behind a hill similar to the one he was standing on.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "That looks as though something is going to turn up. I have been wondering why it was that we have seen nothing of that scoundrel, Tony Pedro. I won't be a bit surprised if we come across him before another day is over."

He waited to get sight of the horsemen again, but they did not show up.

Then he came to the conclusion that they must have halted behind the hill, which was about three miles distant.

"Boys," said he, addressing his two partners, as he walked back to the bustling camp, "I guess we have something on hand after it gets dark."

"What is it, Wild?" asked Jim, while the scout looked expectant.

"I just caught sight of four men on horseback over there," and he pointed out the direction.

"Yer did!" Charlie exclaimed, eagerly. "Bad galoots, I'll bet!"

"Well, I saw nothing to indicate that they were bad. But they just disappeared behind a hill over there, and they stayed there, too, for I waited to see them show up further on, and they failed to do so."

"I wonder if one of them could be the rascally guide we let go?" Dart observed, thoughtfully.

"I reckon that's what we'll find out," the scout nodded.

"Most likely," Wild admitted.

They said nothing to any of the rest, but waited for their supper.

Meanwhile the sun was pretty well down now. The slanting streaks of red and yellow glimmered on the hill-tops, leaving shadows in the hollow places.

The western sky just then was something beautiful to look upon, so much in contrast was it to the almost barren waste of undulating prairie land.

But the scene was lost upon our friends, for the times were so many that they had gazed upon similar scenes that they could hardly appreciate this one.

Wild noticed that Ned Lake and Belle had been more together that afternoon than at any time since he had known them.

"Et," said he, "I guess you have taken some of the jolly spirit out of the Broncho Queen. She is one of the kind who like to tantalize lovers and sweethearts, and that is why she paid so much attention to me. But since she has found that she has been eclipsed by you, she has settled down to mind her own business, and to love her lover, as a nice girl should. I hardly think you will have any further occasion to get jealous about her."

"Why, I wasn't jealous of her, Wild," the girl declared, her face reddening. "I just felt——"

"You just felt that no other girl should try to flirt with me, that's all, little one. That is a mild form of jealousy, I reckon. But it is all right, for it shows that you think a whole lot of me, and that is what I want you to."

"Sometimes I wonder why it is that every girl you meet don't fall in love with you, Wild," Arietta said, speaking

earnestly. "You are so much nobler and—and better looking than the average boy or young man. You are——"

"There, sweetheart! Don't say any more," and he laughingly put his hand over her mouth. "I don't want to hear it. I am only a real boy of the West, I hope. That is quite enough for me, for in no other part of the world can better people be found than in the West—the glorious West of the United States of America!"

The boy grew a trifle dramatic as he spoke, and Arietta looked at him in silent admiration.

There was no question but that she really believed him to be her true ideal of budding manhood.

The two talked on in this strain until the piping voice of Wing, their cook, announced that supper was ready.

Our friends had decided to live the same as if they were alone, though they need not have touched their own provisions if they had not wished to.

After all had eaten the evening meal Ben Hope, the fiddler, patched up the strings of his instrument and treated them to a little old-fashioned music.

Ned Lake suggested a dance, and as there were enough to make up a couple of sets willing to it, they had a lively time of it in the twilight.

It was while the dance was going on that Hop, the clever Chinaman, got it in his head that he would like to have a drink of tanglefoot, as he called whisky.

One of his failings was that he liked to get tipsy now and then.

He had been without anything in that line to drink for over a week now, and he had discovered that some of the men had whisky with them.

He had even learned that there was a big jug of it in the wagon that was owned by a man named Daggett.

It was a good time now to get at the jug, so the Celestial thought, and, leaving the merry-makers to themselves, he sneaked off and made his way around to the other side of the wagon.

If he had no liquor, Hop certainly had bottles that were empty, which had once contained it.

A collection of bottles was one of his hobbies.

He had two quart bottles in his big pocket as he made for the wagon.

He had decided that if he could get one drink he might as well stock up with enough to have twenty or thirty later on.

Hop reached the wagon without being seen, and it was not long before he had mounted to the front and crept inside.

Then the search for the tanglefoot began.

In less than five minutes he found it, and, weighing it in his hand, he concluded that there was just about enough in it to fill his two bottles.

With the squeaking of the old violin and the shouts of laughter of the dancers ringing in his ears, the Celestial poured the whisky from the jug into the bottles.

He had judged it quite accurately, for there was less than half a pint left.

"Lat no good for Melican mans," he muttered, and he tipped the jug and swallowed the balance.

Smacking his lips, he crept out of the wagon and made

his way around to where the two tents of Young Wild West's party had been pitched.

Hop had swallowed just about enough tanglefoot to make him feel hilarious.

As the dancing ceased he struck up a Chinese ditty, and then he got up and began to dance.

"He's drunk, as sure as you're born!" declared Cheyenne Charlie. "I wonder where ther galoot got it?"

"That jest reminds me," spoke up Daggett, the man Hop had stolen the whisky from. "I've got a jug of good stuff in ther wagon. We'll have a little."

Charlie shrugged his shoulders.

"Jest look an' see if you've got it," he said.

The man hastened to do so.

The next minute he came running back with the empty jug.

"Some galoot has cleaned out my good liquor!" he exclaimed.

"I thought so," and the scout gave a chuckle. "Ther heathen is ther galoot, all right. He's got part of your rum inside of him at this minute. Wild, you'd better see to it afore he drinks ther rest of it an' kills himself."

CHAPTER XI

WILD SPIES ON THE FOUR VILLAINS AND LEARNS THEIR PLANS.

Hop Wah certainly heard and saw what was going on, but he kept right on dancing and singing.

"Me feel allee samee bully boy, with um glasse eye!" he shouted. "Me velly muchee smartee, so be!"

"Hey!" yelled Daggett, holding up the empty jug. "Do you know anything about this?"

The Chinaman ceased his antics right away.

"Me no undelstand," he declared, shaking his head and looking as innocent as a little child.

"See here, Hop," said Wild, sternly. "What did you do with the whisky you took from that jug?"

"Me no——"

"What did you do with it?"

Wild meant business, and Hop knew it.

"Me allee samee dlink um tanglefoot, Misl Wild," was the meek reply.

"Yer couldn't have done it," spoke up Daggett. "There was a good half a gallon in ther jug this mornin', an' no one touched it since but you."

Our hero kept a very stern expression on his face and drew one of his shooters.

"Produce the whisky, Hop," he said. "If you don't I will shoot off your eyebrows!"

"Allee light, Misl Wild; me takee just for um lillee fun. Me gittee, allee samee, pletty quickee, so be."

He hastened to where his pack saddle was, and, lifting it from the ground, disclosed the two bottles of liquor.

"Bling um jug here, so be," he said, blandly.

The man who had missed the whisky gladly handed him the jug.

Then, just as though he was merely doing a favor for him, Hop poured the whisky into the jug.

But he managed to leave a little in each bottle, all right.

"Velly funny jokee, so be," he remarked, as Daggett took the jug.

"You might think so," was the dry retort. "It wouldn't been much of a joke if I hadn't missed it jest now, I reckon. I s'pose if I had waited till to-morrer ter take a drink I wouldn't have got very much of ther rum back."

"Lat light, so be."

Then Hop started to dancing again.

Charlie turned away in disgust.

"That's one thing ther heathen galoot will never be broke of," he said. "He'll always steal whisky as long as he lives."

Charlie took a little with Daggett, as did some of the other men.

By this time it was quite dark.

"Now, boys," said our hero, "I guess we will take a ride around for a few minutes."

"Where are you going, Wild?" Arietta asked.

"Well, I have got an idea that some one is around," was the reply. "I want to find out about it."

All who heard what he said were interested right away.

But he did not choose to tell them any more just then.

As he knew the spot where he had seen the four horse-men disappear was fully three miles away, he went for his horse and saddled it.

Charlie and Jim quickly followed his example.

"It ain't Injuns, is it?" Pete Darling asked, as they mounted.

"Oh, no!" our hero answered. "We'll let you know all about it when we come back. There is nothing to worry over."

The three then rode off.

Wild did not want to approach the hill straight from the camp, as he thought it most likely that the four men had seen the light from the fires there, and if they were enemies they would be keeping a lookout in that direction.

He led the way off to the north, and when they had covered a mile he swung around and approached the spot he had impressed on his mind in a circle.

"I reckon we'll soon be able to see the campfire, if they have got any," Wild observed, as they were about a mile from the hill.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when they caught just the glimmer of a light ahead.

"There she is!" exclaimed the scout. "They've got some kind of light there, anyhow."

"We'll let the horses walk now, I guess," answered our hero.

This they did, and when they got a little nearer they saw that it was a small fire that was burning.

But it was pretty well burned out, and the light that came from it was not much.

The three kept on until they were within a little less than a quarter of a mile from it, and then they halted and dismounted.

"Now, you fellows stay here with the horses, and I'll go over and find out what sort of a crowd it is," said Wild.

"You might come up a little closer, though, if you like. But wait until you think I am about there before you do."

Then the young deadshot started on his mission.

As he drew nearer he became more cautious, for he was firmly convinced that the four men he was approaching were enemies, and that one of them was no other than Tony Pedro.

A minute or two later he was able to distinguish the forms of three men and four horses.

One of the horsemen he had seen before dark was missing.

A little closer and he found that one of the three was an Indian.

Then he recognized the other two as the rascals they had taken in the night before, and who had tried to rob the ranchman.

"So, they are here, are they?" he thought. "Well, I might have guessed that, if I had tried hard. But I only thought of the villainous guide. It must be that he is the one who is missing, for I know there were four of them, and there are four horses here."

Just then a man came down the little hill and joined the others.

It was Tony Pedro.

Wild gave a nod of deep satisfaction and then proceeded to creep a little nearer.

He was not long in getting close enough to hear the conversation of the four men.

"They are right over there, I tell you," he heard Tony Pedro say. "But I don't think it will be safe to tackle them to-night. There is no place to hide should they get after us, you know."

"Ugh!" answered the redskin. "We must not let them know we come, Tony."

"That's all right, Jack. But you know I told you that we have got pretty sharp customers to deal with when we tackle Young Wild West and his partners. If it was only the gang of emigratin' people it would be easy enough."

"That's as sure as anything," spoke up Dave Mott. "I reckon, though, that if we waited till jest afore daylight we might catch 'em nappin'. If it wasn't that you was bound ter git ther gal, Tony, I think we might rob that galoot of a ranchman."

"Well, you can do that first. I'll get the girl all right."

"Jest as you say. What do yer think about waitin' till jest afore daylight, an' then tacklin' ther job?"

"I think it will be a good idea."

"We'll be all ready ter light out, anyhow, an' afore they could git after us we ought ter have a good start in ther dark," observed Rip Howard, shaking his head, as though he thought his advice was of great importance.

Wild chuckled softly to himself.

"I reckon you fellows don't know enough to go in when it rains," he muttered, under his breath. "Just try your little game, and I reckon some of you will feel hot lead."

He remained there a little longer, and when he turned to go back to his waiting partners he was satisfied that the four scoundrels meant to try and sneak upon the camp shortly before daylight.

Their purpose was to steal what money they could and make off with Belle Darling, providing there was the least

chance to get hold of her without arousing the inmates of the camp.

Wild found Charlie and Jim quite close by.

They had come up and forced the horses to lie down, so they would not be discovered if any of the villains happened to come out and look that way.

The young deadshot quickly told them what he had seen and heard.

"So that is their game, is it?" Jim remarked. "Well, it is a good thing we came here, I guess. They might have been able to carry out at least part of their scheme if we knew nothing of it."

"They might, if everybody was sound asleep," spoke up the scout. "But that wouldn't be their case. But it's a mighty good thing ter know what they're up ter, jest ther same."

The horses were made to rise, and then, leading them away to a safe distance, they mounted and rode back to the camp.

Then Young Wild West surprised all hands by telling them the whole thing.

"So Tony Pedro is still after Belle, is he?" the ranchman exclaimed. "Well, I reckon I've got a bullet waitin' fur ther galoot, that's all!"

"I've got one, too, pop!" spoke up the Broncho Queen. "He will never get me again."

"Jest wait till I git a good sight of him!" said Ned Lake, his eyes flashing. "I'll show him that I kin shoot straight enough ter fetch him. Ther black-hearted scoundrel ain't fit ter live, an' that's all there is to it!"

"You've got that right, Lake," Cheyenne Charlie hastened to say. "Yer kin bet that Tony Pedro will never make old bones. Ther coyotes is sharpenin' their teeth fur him at this very minute, I'll bet!"

It was decided to keep an extra man on guard during the entire night, for they did not know but that the villains might change their plans and come earlier.

Our friends were not much worried, though some of the emigrants appeared to be.

CHAPTER XII.

THE VILLAINS MAKE A FAILURE OF IT.

The night wore on and nothing but the sounds made by the insects and the howl of an occasional coyote could be heard.

When it was a few minutes to four in the morning Wild, who was then awake, roused Charlie and Jim.

He knew it was about time for the villains to show themselves, if they really meant to.

The three then placed themselves in different places, so they would be certain to know if an outsider sneaked into the camp.

The men doing guard duty just then were alert, too, for when they caught Wild moving toward the wagons one of them got very close to him to see who he was before he found it was not a stranger.

"Just keep quiet, everybody," the young deadshot said. "Keep your eyes and ears open, too."

Then he dropped down close to one of the wagons and waited.

Charlie and Jim were stationed where the villains might sneak into the camp, too, so it was going to be a pretty cute piece of business if Tony Pedro carried out his plans.

It was Pedro himself that Wild was laying for.

That was why he chose a place near the three prairie schooners to watch.

He knew that the villainous guide was more than anxious to abduct the Broncho Queen, and as she was asleep in one of the wagons there was where he would have to go to get hold of her.

The boy had not settled down into a comfortable position to wait more than five minutes when he heard a slight rustle in the dry grass a short distance away.

"Ah!" he thought. "Here they come. Now to give the galoots the surprise of their lives!"

It was pretty dark now, though the stars were out.

Young Wild West kept his gaze riveted on the spot the sound had come from, and the next moment he distinctly saw a moving figure.

He knew that it was quite certain that others of the gang were creeping up in different places, but he was not going to give the alarm.

Wild would take his chances on the watchfulness of his partners.

If they allowed any of the thieves to creep into the camp and get in their work it would be something rather strange and unusual for them.

Wild watched closely.

The figure was moving directly toward the wagon he was crouching partly under.

Whoever it was, he was very stealthy in his movements.

But Wild was not more than a few seconds in finding out that it was the Indian he had seen at the camp he had spied upon the night before.

Then he easily understood why he was so stealthy in his movements.

The boy waited as calmly as though it was all a joke that was being played.

The redskin crept up to the wagon, listened with his ear close to the ground, and then arose to his feet.

He moved noiselessly toward the front of the wagon, which was open to admit air to those who were sleeping in it.

Then Young Wild West arose to his feet and started after the red scoundrel.

If the Indian could move without making a sound, so could the dashing young deadshot.

Jack Soldier Coat listened again, and then he put his moccasined foot upon the wagon pole and climbed up, so he might crawl into the wagon.

Wild thought he had gone about far enough, so, with a sudden leap, he caught the scoundrel by the ankle.

A quick jerk from the athletic boy and the redskin's head came down upon the ground with a thud.

"Shoot every stranger you find in the camp, boys!" called out Young Wild West in a voice that rang out clear and distinct.

Then he hit the redskin a crack on the head with the

butt of his revolver, which served to daze him long enough to be relieved of his weapons without a struggle.

"Get up, you sneaking coyote!" Wild commanded, when he saw that the fellow was quite capable of doing it.

"Ugh!" was the reply

"You will grunt worse than that before long," our hero responded. "I'll show you what bad Indians get when they sneak into the camps of the palefaces and try to steal."

At that moment a shot rang out, followed by a shriek of agony.

Wild hustled his prisoner in the direction it came from.

"I've got one of them!" he called out, so he would not be mistaken for an intruder.

"An' I reckon I got one of 'em," was the reply in the voice of Pete Darling. "He was tryin' ter git in my pockets afore your hollered out, but I didn't say nothin', as I had him covered from under ther blanket. When you hollered out, he come for me an' tried ter knock my head off with ther butt of his revolver. I caught his arm, an' then we had a wrastle fur a few seconds. I upset him, an' then he raised his shooter ter let me have it, so I popped him."

While the ranchman was explaining Wild could hear the sounds of receding hoofs.

He then knew that all four of the villains must have come to make the attempt to rob the ranchman and steal his daughter.

But he did not choose to follow them.

"Let the others go," he said, as Charlie came up with his horse. "We'll catch them later on. Let's see who it is that Pete shot."

A lantern was quickly brought, and then the man, who was quite dead now, proved to be the villain who had given his name as Rip Howard.

The emigrants crowded around, and all had as much of a look as they cared to take.

Jack Soldier Coat saw, too, but he did not make a sign.

He was apparently indifferent.

But that is the way of an Indian.

"That's what ought ter be done ter you, you red galoot!" exclaimed the scout, as he pointed to the dead man on the ground with one hand and shook the other in the Indian's face.

"Ugh!" was the grunting reply, which meant that the rascal didn't care what the palefaces said.

"Just tie him up, boys," said Wild, coolly. "We'll settle on what is to be done with him after we have had breakfast. It is beginning to get a bit light in the east, so there is no use of any one thinking of getting any more sleep now."

Of course everybody belonging to the party was awake. Even if the voices of Wild and the others had not been heard the shout would have aroused them.

In a few minutes the campfires were started, and then the preparations for an early breakfast began.

The Indian was brought over close to the quarters of Wild and his companions.

"You just sit down by him and keep a watch on him, Hop," our hero said, as he saw the Chinaman regarding him with no little interest.

"Allee light, Misler Wild," was the reply. "Me allee samee watchee um ledskin pretty muchee goodee, so be."

Hop was much pleased to be put in charge of him.

"Whatee you namee, so be?" he asked, smiling pleasantly at the prisoner.

For a wonder, the Apache took a notion to gratify his curiosity.

"Me Jack Soldier Coat," he answered. "Me good Injun."

"Jackee Soldier Coatee, and um velly goodee ledskin, so be. Lat velly nicee."

"The Chinee is a great brave," said Jack Soldier Coat, evidently trying to get in favor with his guard. "Me like the Chinee."

"Me likee ledskin, too," answered Hop, smiling blandly. "But me no likee velly close by, so be. Me likee velly far away."

"If the Chinee will let Jack Soldier Coat go I will make him very rich. I know where there is plenty of gold, and I will tell him."

"Lat velly muchee nicee. Me likee be velly muchee lich, but me no lettee Jackee Soldier Coatee go, so be."

An angry glance shot from the eyes of the captive redskin.

He now understood that there was no hope for him from the Chinaman, anyhow.

He lapsed into a moody silence.

Hop tried to talk with him, but it was no use.

Meanwhile it was getting lighter all the while now, and soon the eastern sky was aglow.

Two of the emigrants were scooping out a shallow grave for the villain who had been shot, and Pete Darling was bossing the job.

Breakfast was soon ready and then Hop, who was very hungry, left his prisoner close to the fire and went over to where his brother was, in the hope of getting hold of something to nibble on while he waited.

Jack Soldier Coat was just desperate enough to take any kind of a chance to get away.

The Chinaman had scarcely turned his back when he rolled over, so that his bound hands came in contact with the red-hot brands in the fire.

He meant to burn his bonds!

Of course, his hands and wrists would suffer, too, but that was not so much for an Indian to stand.

The cords took fire right away, and in less than five minutes the redskin had his blistered hands free.

It was but the work of a moment for him to untie the rope that was about his ankles.

Then he crawled silently away and made for the horses.

Jack Soldier Coat was free, and he knew it.

He got one of the horses belonging to the emigrants and, mounting it, rode off!

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE BANK OF THE SAN JUAN RIVER.

Hop turned to go back to the prisoner just as he was mounting the horse.

The Chinaman, seeing that the redskin was gone, looked wildly around in search of him.

Then he saw him riding away to the West.

Hop felt ashamed of himself for having left the rascal, and thus allowed him to get away.

Just how he had managed to do it, the Celestial did not know. But he did know that he was responsible for him, since Wild had placed him in charge of the redskin.

Hop's piebald broncho was not far away.

Acting on a sudden impulse, he darted for the steed, taking the bridle with him.

He got the bridle on, and was in the act of mounting, when Cheyenne Charlie came running for his horse.

The scout, as well as the rest, had heard and seen the Indian as he rode away on the back of the mustang.

"Me catchee um ledskin, Misler Charlie!" exclaimed the clever Chinaman, and then he was on the mustang's back and off like a shot.

Hop had the advantage, in one way.

The Indian had no bridle on the horse he was riding, and he could not get the speed out of it that he could have if the animal was bridled.

Neither could he guide it just where he wanted to.

Hop could.

Jack Soldier Coat was unarmed, too, and Hop possessed a keen-edged hunting knife and a big, old-fashioned six-shooter that was loaded with powder and bullets.

But he was not much of a shot.

He had barely got away on the trail of the redskin, who was about two hundred yards ahead now, when Wild and his partners got their horses ready to mount.

They started in pursuit, though our hero did not know what to do with the redskin after he was caught.

He was not the one to pronounce a sentence of death upon him.

When he saw Hop flourish his big revolver our hero could not help smiling.

"Take it easy, boys," he said. "I reckon we'll see a little fun out of this. The redskin has nothing to defend himself with, so we will let Hop capture him. He can easily overtake him, for the galoot is having all he can do to keep the stolen horse from turning back to the camp."

This was indeed the case.

Pete Darling now came galloping out, followed by half a dozen of his men, who all seemed to be eager to capture the escaping redskin.

Wild told them to take it easy and let the Chinaman do the trick.

Meanwhile Hop was doing lots of thinking in a very short space of time.

He did not mean to shoot the redskin, unless he could not do otherwise. His desire was to get him back where he had escaped from, since he had got away by his negligence.

Hop was a pretty fair rider.

He soon swooped down upon the Indian, who was vainly trying to force the stolen horse ahead.

"You allee samee sullender, or me shootee!" the Chinaman cried, brandishing his big revolver.

"Ugh!" retorted Jack Soldier Coat. "Chinee heap much fool!"

"Me showee!"

Then Hop fired a shot in the air.

But the Indian did not scare for a cent.

The fact was that he had his eye on the Chinaman's horse and revolver.

He wanted them both.

But when he saw the crowd riding out he knew that he would have to work quickly.

Suddenly he let the horse he was riding turn around toward the camp.

Back he came, straight for the Chinaman.

"Hip hi!" yelled Hop. "Mislir Wild! Hully up!"

It so happened that the stolen broncho made a swerve just then, and the redskin, who was in the act of reaching out to grab the Chinaman, was thrown to the ground.

Hop dismounted in a twinkling and fell upon him.

Whack!

He brought the heavy pistol down upon his head and stretched him out, unconscious.

"Me catchee, allee samee, so be," he exclaimed. "Hip, hoolay! Me allee samee bully boy with um glasse eye!"

Wild and the rest rode up, laughing at the sight they had witnessed.

The Chinaman had caught the redskin, sure enough. But it was not altogether due to his skill and daring.

If the horse had not swerved just as it did things might have been different for a minute or two.

Jack Soldier Coat had a pretty thick skull, and as the blow had been a glancing one, he quickly recovered from the effects of it.

"Fetch him back to the camp, boys," said Wild.

This was duly done.

But our hero did not know what to do with the redskin.

He did not want to be bothered with him.

He held a consultation with his partners and Darling after the breakfast was over with, and then it was decided to let him go.

Jack Soldier Coat could hardly believe his ears when he heard the result of the conference.

"Me good Injun!" he declared.

"Yes, we know all about that," Young Wild West replied. Now you can have your pistol and knife, and then you can foot it to where your rascally companions are. You tell Tony Pedro that Young Wild West wants to have that race with him. Do you understand?"

"Yes; Jack Soldier Coat understands."

"Well, that's all there is to it, then. Now, strike out!"

Having received his weapons, the redskin lost no time in obeying.

He went away on a run.

"Hip hi!" shouted Hop after him. "Ledskin allee samee velly muchee 'flaid!"

There was no reply to this, but it was more than likely that Jack Soldier Coat would get square with the Chinaman if he ever got the chance.

The sun was not much more than up when our friends were ready to resume their journey.

When all was in readiness they set out for the timber, which now showed up in the distance.

When they got to the place where the quartette of vil-

lains had been camped the night before they found it deserted.

But over a mile ahead of them they could see Jack Soldier Coat following the trail.

"Ther galoot will keep on that jog trot fur hours, if he has ter," remarked Cheyenne Charlie. "He may catch up with ther galoots when he gits to ther woods, fur it's most likely they're waitin' there."

"That's right," nodded our hero. "Eight or ten miles is not much of a run for a redskin."

Half an hour later the Indian reached the timber and was lost to view.

The sun was shining like a great ball of fire, and as the travelers had no cool water to drink, they were anxious to strike some.

When they finally reached the shade of the trees they were much relieved.

"I smell mud, all right," said our hero, as he sniffed the air. "By jove! I never thought of it! The San Juan River must be pretty close by."

"That's right, Wild, an' when we strike it all we've got ter do is ter foller along ther bank an' ride over inter Utah. We've been there afore, yer know. I reckon we ain't more'n five miles away from ther last trail we foltered in these parts."

Wild knew this was right, when he came to think of it.

"Come on this way," he said, after a pause.

They rode on through the woods, and in a few minutes they struck a fresh trail.

"The villains are heading for the river, too, I guess," remarked Dart.

"Oh, yes. They know that it is best to keep close to water."

Twenty minutes later they came to a stream of water that was fully a hundred yards in width.

It was surely the San Juan River, and now Young Wild West knew exactly where they were.

From the starting point to there was a territory they hadn't traveled over, though they had been all around it.

The horses were eager to get at the water, so they were allowed to have their own way about it.

Wild advised a halt, anyhow, for he knew it would be advisable to let the horses have a nip at the grass and mequite that grew abundantly along the river bank.

"Hop, you and Wing go up the stream a little distance, where the water is clear, and get a couple of pails," he called out to the two Chinamen, as they disappeared.

"Allee light," was the reply.

"Come, Arietta," spoke up Belle Darling, a smile on her face, as she spoke. "We will ride after them and protect them from the Indian, who may be lying in wait to get revenge upon Hop."

"All right," Arietta answered, and then they rode along after the two Celestials.

They had scarcely got out of sight around a big clump of trees when a scream for help was heard.

CHAPTER XIV.

TONY PEDRO MAKES ANOTHER DARING ATTEMPT.

Tony Pedro and Dave Mott had made their escape that morning more by good luck than anything else.

The moment Young Wild West sounded the alarm, after capturing the Indian, they started to run.

They had been right at the edge of the camp, looking around for a chance to carry out their purpose, and, leaving their companions to their fate, they ran for the horses they had waiting a short distance away.

When the shot rang out, followed by the cry of agony, they knew that it was Rip Howard who had got the bullet.

Pedro mounted his horse in a twinkling.

Mott was not far behind him, and then they rode, the other two horses following of their own accord.

The two scoundrels did not stop until they got to the place they had camped at.

Then they waited and watched until it grew daylight, hoping that Jack Soldier Coat would appear.

But as he did not show up, they mounted and started for the timber they could see in the distance.

As the rise in the ground hid the camp from them, they did not see the bold attempt to escape the redskin made.

They kept on, feeling in anything but a pleasant mood, and finally they reached the timber.

Then they halted and looked back.

"I reckon we're in fur it now," said Dave Mott, shaking his head, sadly. "Poor Rip must have got his medicine, an' ther Injun was catched. I don't understand why it was that they was so quick ter find out we was there."

"It is too bad," Pedro admitted. "But just wait! I'll kill Young Wild West for this, as sure as you are standing there, Dave Mott! And I'll have that gal, too!"

"Better let ther gal part of it be, Tony. No good will come of it, if yer keep it up. A woman always makes trouble, no matter what she's connected with. I don't blame yer fur wantin' ter git square with Young Wild West, though. I'll help yer ter do that. If we can't do no better we'll lay fur 'em, an' when they come along we'll both shoot at ther boy at one time. It's most sure that one of our bullets will find him."

Pedro nodded.

"Just wait till I climb a tree and have a look," said he. "It may be that they're in sight by this time."

"Most likely they are, Tony."

The villainous guide, who wanted the ranchman's daughter for a bride so bad, quickly ascended a tree and took a look over the back trail.

He caught sight of the prairie schooners right away, but when he saw Jack Soldier Coat coming along away ahead of them on foot, he felt like letting out a yell of joy.

As it was, he called out, excitedly:

"Dave, the redskin is coming!"

"What!" cried Mott.

"That's right. And the party is coming on behind him. They must have let him go."

"Yer didn't see nothin' of Rip, did yer?" asked Mott, anxiously, as Tony descended the tree.

The villain shook his head.

"No," he answered. "I reckon he got fixed when that shooter sounded. Yer may as well give him up as gone, Dave."

"He was a putty good pard, he was," and a tear came in the eye of the ragged rascal. "Well, if it had ter be, I

s'pose there's no use in worryin' about it. I jest want ter find out who ther galoot was that give him his medicine, though."

"It was Young Wild West, or one of his pards, yer kin bet on that!"

"I s'pose so."

"Well, we'll wait till Jack gits here. He's runnin' like a deer. It won't be very long afore he shows up. It's a mighty good thing that his horse follered us."

"Yes, an' there's Rip's horse, too."

"Well, that'll come in handy."

After what seemed to be a long time they saw the Indian appear over a rise, half a mile away.

Knowing that they could not be seen very well, the two villains waved their hats encouragingly to the redskin.

On came Jack Soldier Coat, keeping up the steady lope the Apaches are common for.

But he was pretty well exhausted when he reached the edge of the woods, just the same.

"Where's Rip, Jack?" asked Mott, as he greeted him and turned his horse over to him.

"Dead," was the reply.

"I told yer so!" exclaimed Pedro "Now, jest give up thinkin' about him till we git things straightened out a little. There's three of us, an' if we work it right we'll be able to do somethin' yet."

"Me tired!" panted Jack, as he learned against his horse and tried to regain his breath.

Pedro gave him a boost and got him astride of the horse.

"Did they let yer go, Jack?" he asked.

"Yes. Young Wild West say go, and me come. He say for you to come and have race with him."

"He did, eh? Well, I reckon ther only race I'll have with him now will be with a bullet. It'll be my bullet, too, an' I hope it will catch him."

"Young Wild West heap much fight; he very smart," retorted the Indian.

"That's all right, too. But he kin be catched nappin', as well as any one else. Now we'll go to ther river, which is only a little distance to ther right, an' then we'll wait fur 'em there. We kin find a good place ter hide, I guess."

The villain was well acquainted with the country, and the next minute they were riding for the river, the horse that belonged to Howard being led by Mott.

When they came to the bank of the river they rode along a few yards and then they came to a shallow cave that opened on a narrow strip of sand, right close to the water.

"We'll stop here till they come up," said Tony. "I've been here afore. There's a place ter ford right ahead there."

The three dismounted, and the Indian and Mott left it to Pedro to do the ordering.

Jack Soldier Coat had barely had a good rest from his long run when they heard the wagon train coming over the trail through the woods.

Pedro's companions looked at him, anxiously.

There was a queer light in the eyes of the villain.

"It may be that I will get a chance to get the girl," he

said, in a hoarse whisper. "You fellows be ready to ride away with me. My horse is faster than yours, so if I get her I'll go for the ford, which is around the bend up there. You come on as fast as you can, and shoot at Young Wild West when he follows. Do you understand?"

They nodded, though they acted as though they would rather be out of sight of Young Wild West, instead of attempting to ford the river right before his eyes.

Pedro now mounted his horse and rode out of the cave.

He had barely done so when Hop and Wing appeared, each carrying a pail, and, close behind them, on horseback, were the Broncho Queen and Arietta.

The villain's heart gave a jump.

There was the girl he wanted, only a few yards from him!

He made up his mind to take another chance at it, regardless of the fact that Young Wild West was so close by.

He turned and went back far enough to see his two companions.

"Come on!" he whispered. "Now is the time!"

The two Chinamen were just dipping their pails in the water when a startling thing occurred.

Tony Pedro's lariat shot out of the bushes and caught the Broncho Queen squarely about the waist, pinning her right arm to her side.

She let out a scream, as did Arietta, the moment she comprehended her companion's danger.

Then the two Celestials dropped their pails and yelled, for they looked around in time to see the girl dragged from the back of her horse, and the arm of a man encircle her waist.

It was a daring thing to do, but Tony Pedro had done it pretty well.

How it would end was another thing.

But it is safe to say that he only thought of the present just then.

As he got Belle on the horse with him he gave a quick turn with the lariat and pinned her other arm.

Then he uttered a shout of defiance and turned his horse to the strip of sand that sloped to the water's edge.

Around the bend he galloped before his companions could get their horses in motion.

Then Mott hung back.

"We'd better stay right here," he said, hoarsely.

The redskin nodded.

Back the pair went to the cave, for they knew that pursuit had already started.

The fact was that Arietta had shouted for Wild as the villain rode off with the struggling Broncho Queen, and she was now leading the pursuit.

Dave Mott and the Indian had dismounted, and they were holding their horses back in the shallow cave.

They heard the splash as Pedro took to the river, and then followed more splashing, which told them that he must have a slim chance to get away.

For five minutes they waited, and then, suddenly, two Chinamen walked right into the cave.

They were Hop and Wing, of course.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RACE BETWEEN THE SORREL AND BLACK STARTS.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Jack Soldier Coat, as he recognized Hop.

Then he made a leap forward and caught the Chinaman by the throat.

Wing was too astonished even to utter a cry, and before he could make a move Dave Mott had him by the arm and a revolver pressed against his temple.

"Jest one little cry an' you'll be a dead heathen!" he exclaimed, in a low tone of voice.

Both Celestials threw up their hands in token of submission.

The Indian released his grip upon Hop's throat.

Then, while his companion covered the pair, he bound them.

"Chinee heap much fool!" he ventured.

"Lat light," Hop answered, for he was quick to recover himself, generally. "We hear allee samee horsee makee feet go, and we comee to look. Find ledskin and bad Melican man, so be."

"We kill fools! Ugh!"

"You bette not kill, so be. Young Wild West allee samee makee pletty quicke killlee you!"

Evidently Jack Soldier Coat thought that was about the size of it, for he shrugged his shoulders and looked at Mott, as though for advice.

"I don't know as we've got much by gittin' ther two heathens," that worthy remarked. "Of course, if we'd let 'em gone out they would have brought a gang here, an' then it would have been all up with us in a hurry. But it won't make any difference, anyhow. We won't git away from here, 'tain't likely."

"Ugh!" the redskin was more uneasy than ever.

"You allee samee bette lettee poor Chinamen go," said Hop, speaking in a voice loud enough to be heard quite some distance.

"Stop talkin' so loud!" commanded Mott.

But Hop had accomplished what he wanted to, for the next moment hurried footsteps were heard coming around the side of the little hill into which the cave was located.

Jack Soldier Coat quickly grabbed the bridle of the horse he rode and led it to the outside.

Then he mounted and forced the animal to plunge into the water, which was quite deep at that point.

Accepting the move as an example, Mott mounted and followed him.

Splash! went his horse into the river.

Crack—crack—crack!

A volley of revolver shots sounded, and then Hop looked out and saw two riderless horses making for the opposite shore.

"Hip hi! Help!" he yelled, shrilly.

"Where are yer?" came an answering voice.

Before either of the prisoners could answer Pete Darling put in an appearance.

"Thunder!" he gasped. "How did yer git here?"

Hop tried to explain, but the ranchman was too much excited over what had happened to his daughter to listen. He quickly cut the two Celestials loose and then ran from the cave.

Hop and Wing followed and soon were back where the members of the party who had not started in pursuit of Tony Pedro were waiting.

"Come along with ther wagons," shouted Darling. "There's a ford here."

The man had mounted his horse as soon as he cut the two Chinamen loose, and he was now going in pursuit after Young Wild West and the others.

Hop hastened to get the pack horses and assist the few men who had remained to get the horses in line.

In about ten minutes they were fording the river, which proved to be quite shallow there.

Once on the other side, they took the trail and went on through the woods.

It was only a thin strip of timber on that side, as it proved, and then the rolling prairie was disclosed to view.

"Somebody allee samee shootee um ledskin and bad Melican man," Hop remarked to one of the drivers.

"I reckon somebody did," was the reply. "We all had a crack at 'em when we seen 'em in ther river. They got what they deserved, I reckon."

"Lat light, so be."

A mile or two ahead they could see those who had gone in pursuit.

They were at a halt, and that made those with the wagons think that the Broncho Queen had been rescued.

And so it proved, for two minutes after she came riding that way, with Arietta at her side.

Anna and Eloise, who were very much worried over what had happened, urged their horses forward to meet them.

It will be in order to explain how it was that the girl had escaped from the villain.

When Pedro took to the water he looked over his shoulder and saw that Arietta was riding swiftly after him.

As he reached the other side he saw that Young Wild West was close behind the girl.

He was desperate now, and he meant to get away with his prize or die.

His horse reached the other side and was soon running through the woods.

Then it was that something intervened to help the captive girl.

The lariat that Pedro had wound about her body was trailing the ground, and by accident it caught upon a gnarled root.

As the rope tightened with a jerk, the girl was whisked from the horse before the villain knew it.

Then he knew he had lost her.

He almost made up his mind to try and get her, but when he saw Young Wild West on his gallant sorrel he decided to flee.

Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that all his pursuers but one had stopped to give aid to the Broncho Queen.

The one who did not stop was Young Wild West.

"Come on!" he shouted, defiantly. "You will never get me, unless you shoot, Young Wild West!"

"I won't shoot!" was the reply.

The Broncho Queen was not much hurt by the fall, and as soon as she was released from the rope she sprang to her feet, and, waving her hat, exclaimed:

"Catch him, Wild! Win the race!"

"Oh, Wild will catch him—never fear!" said Arietta, as she brushed the dirt from the girl's clothing.

"Yer kin bet your life he will!" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, mounting his horse to follow and see the finish of the race.

He was leading the horse that Belle had been whisked from by the daring villain.

Just then Ned Lake came in sight.

A cry of joy came from the young man's lips.

It did not take long for him to find out how it happened that his sweetheart was free.

Then he assisted her to mount, after which they followed the rest, who were making for the open prairie, in order to get a sight of the race between the sorrel and the black.

They rode on out upon the prairie and had the satisfaction of seeing Young Wild West gaining upon the fugitive.

They kept on until they were a mile out, and then they came to a halt and waited for Pete Darling to come up.

"Ther wagons an' ther rest is comin'!" shouted the old man, when he saw his daughter was with them. "Hooray! Where's Wild?"

"There he goes," answered the Broncho Queen, pointing to the two racing horses. "Wild wants to overhaul the galoot alone. I know that well enough."

So they moved a little further out on the grass-covered plain and then waited.

Wild and the villain he was pursuing were mere specks in the distance when the wagons and rest of the party came up.

"Arietta," said Belle, "let's you and I go out and meet Wild as he comes back."

"All right," was the reply. "We can help him bring in his prisoner. I am sure that he will have a prisoner to fetch in, unless——"

"Unless the black horse proves to be faster than the sorrel, you mean."

"No. I mean unless it comes to a fight."

"Oh, I understand. Then it would mean that Pedro would get his medicine."

"That's about the way it would be, I am sure. Wild never likes to shoot a man, no matter how much of a scoundrel he is, and how well he deserves it. But there are times when he has to do it in order to save his own life."

The girls rode on, and as they looked back they saw that the wagon train had got in motion, and was following them.

"I reckon they didn't have time to get much fresh water," said Belle, shaking her head. "Well, I suppose pop is anxious to get as far as he can to-day, and as it is right on the way to follow Wild he is going to keep on."

"I heard Wild say that he would strike the river again by to-night," Arietta replied. "There is a big bend in it over that way."

"Oh, pop must know that. Well, I wish that race would end pretty soon!"

It was to end pretty soon, too, as they soon found out.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Young Wild West was right in his element when he found that he had a chance to show that Spitfire was the faster of the two steeds.

"Spitfire, old boy!" he said, as he patted the neck of the noble animal. "You must catch that black horse, if it takes until night."

The sorrel gave a whinny, as he always did when he heard his young master speak to him when they were alone.

Then the long race followed.

The sorrel was not doing exactly his best, for Wild was reserving him for the final dash.

The young deadshot knew what his horse was; and though he did not think that there was another one as good in the world, he had never seen one.

That was quite sufficient to make him have the utmost confidence in gallant Spitfire.

Mile after mile was covered, and nearer and nearer Wild got to his man.

He had him beaten now, and he knew it.

He could easily have shot him with his revolver, but so long as Pedro did not show fight he would never do that.

Suddenly the river came in sight ahead of them.

The bend Arietta had spoke of rounded to here.

It was only two miles ahead, and when Pedro saw it he swung off to the right, so as to avoid it.

Wild did not offer to make a short cut to overhaul him quicker.

He made the sorrel follow in the same tracks as the black made.

Tony Pedro waved his hand when he saw this move.

"You've got a mighty good horse, Young Wild West!" he called out. "But you'll see that mine will outwind him. I am to get away without being shot at, I suppose, if I can?"

"That's right," answered our hero. "But you may as well give up, for you are beaten now."

"Not yet!"

The villain had swung around, unknowingly, so far that he was riding almost parallel with the back trail in another minute.

He was no doubt pretty badly worried, and hardly knew which direction he was going.

But five minutes later, when Wild was not more than a hundred feet behind him, and gaining all the time, he suddenly saw the girl he had tried so hard to carry off with him coming straight toward him.

With her was Young Wild West's sweetheart.

But, strange to say, the villain no longer felt a desire to capture the Broncho Queen.

All he thought of now was to get away, and, realizing that he had doubled, he swung off the west.

Wild did the same, not taking the least advantage.

The young deadshot was getting ready to make the final spurt.

He saw Arietta and Belle Darling coming, and he decided to show them how he could catch the black horse.

"Let yourself go, Spitfire!" he suddenly called out.

Though the noble animal had been putting up an awful pace for several miles, he had that spurt left in him.

He bounded forward like a rocket and swooped down upon the black horse with ease.

Revolver in hand, Young Wild West rode past Tony Pedro.

"Stop!" he cried. "You are my prisoner."

The man did not have to be told twice.

"Are you satisfied that your horse is not as good as mine?" Wild asked.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Well, I am glad to hear you say that. Now, just hold up your hands, while I relieve you of your shooters."

"I s'pose there's no use in askin' fur mercy, Young Wild West?"

"You will only be wasting your breath if you do."

"It was only for ther love of that gal that I done what I did."

"Oh, I guess you're a traitor, anyhow! You hired to guide the wagon train to Utah, and then you set your plans to turn traitor and steal the leader's daughter. You'll have to take what's coming to you this time, Tony Pedro!"

The villain said no more, and when our hero told him to walk his horse toward the approaching girls, he did so.

In a very few minutes the two girls came riding up.

"Hooray!" cried the Broncho Queen, in cowboy style. "You've got him, eh?"

"Yes, I won the race," Wild answered. "He has got a good horse, though; there is no mistaking that."

"Who is he going to leave him to when he dies?"

"To you!" was the quick exclamation that came from the lips of the captured villain.

The four rode slowly back to meet the wagon train.

Pedro was getting more sullen every minute now.

Wild knew that he was thinking of making an attempt to escape, so he kept an eye on him.

The villain had no weapons, but his horse was getting rested now, and he no doubt thought there was a chance.

When they were within half a mile of the wagons he suddenly lifted his head, and, fixing his gaze on Belle, exclaimed:

"You can have Dandy when I die! But I am not going to die just yet, unless some one is cowardly enough to shoot an unarmed man."

Then he put spurs to the black, and, with a mighty leap, the animal darted away.

The act was not surprising to Young Wild West.

"Go and get him, girls! Rope him!" he cried out.

Arietta was the first to comprehend.

She urged her horse forward on the jump.

After her came the Broncho Queen.

Their horses were comparatively fresh, compared with the black.

They held him nicely for about a hundred yards and then they began to gain.

Our hero remained at a halt, feeling sure that the villain would be captured.

Suddenly he saw Arietta's lariat go whizzing after the traitor.

Then Belle let hers go.

Pedro dodged in vain.

Both nooses settled over his head and his horse promptly came down to a walk, as his arms were pinned to his sides, and he no longer could guide it.

"Around we go, Arietta!" called out Belle. "You go that way and I'll go this. We'll wind the sneaking coyote up!"

They made two circles, lifting the ropes for the other to ride under, and then Tony Pedro was wound up!

"We have got him, Wild!" cried Arietta, as Young Wild West came galloping up, waving his hat.

"I knew you two girls could do it," he answered. "You have roped the traitor nicely."

A ringing cheer from those approaching rang out.

Pedro's face was livid with rage as he was brought to a halt.

"Take charge of him, boys," said Wild, as Charlie, Jim and Ned Lake rode up.

The girls lets go the lariats.

Then the villain showed that he was not beaten quite yet, for he wrenched his hands free, and, leaping from the back of his horse, he pulled a knife from the belt of Lake and exclaimed:

"If I can't have the Broncho Queen, you never shall, you fool!"

Lake, with great presence of mind, kicked at the maddened scoundrel and caught him under the chin.

Down he dropped like a log, and when Cheyenne Charlie dismounted to seize him he uttered a cry of surprise.

"What's the matter, Charlie?" Wild asked.

"Ther galoot must have fell on ther point of ther knife, fur he's got it right in the heart," was the reply.

This about ends our story.

It is needless to say that the Broncho Queen took the black horse, for after the horror had worn off she felt that the animal was as much hers as anybody's.

She and Arietta were the best of friends, and so they would be as long as they lived.

Young Wild West piloted the wagon train through to where the emigrants wanted to go without further mishap, and our friends remained there long enough to see Ned Lake and the Broncho Queen made man and wife, for the ceremony took place as soon as a clergyman could be found.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST LAYING DOWN THE LAW; or, THE 'BAD' MEN OF BLACK BALL," which will be the next number (263) of "Wild West Weekly."

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SOME GOOD ARTICLES.

One of Mr. Santley's most amusing experiences occurred at Brecon about four years ago, when he assisted Mme. Patti in giving a concert in aid of the local hospital. The prima donna appeared with Mr. Santley in a duet. The vocalists had just recommended singing, when the baritone burst out laughing and left the platform. His companion almost immediately followed, although she attempted to continue. In response to loud cheers, Mme. Patti returned, and said: "The cause of all this merriment is that a wasp has been trying to get into my mouth, and we could not go on."

Jack Hovey has walked over the Tidewater pipe-line from Rixford, McKean county, to Williamsport, Pa., continuously during the last twenty-six years. He makes from eight to twenty-one miles a day, carrying a kit of tools weighing about sixty pounds, among which is a telegraph instrument, which, in case of breaks or other accidents, he attaches to the company wire which follows the line and informs headquarters at Williamsport. The distance is 145 miles as the line runs, up and down hill, across valleys and through woodlands and forests, forty miles of it being through the dense Potter county woods, with scarcely a habitation along the route.

It is said that a flea leaps two hundred times its height, and while it usually does land on its feet, it often fails, especially when it falls on a perfectly smooth surface where the claws can get only a slight hold. A flea has six legs, whose great length and bulk make them so heavy that they must be a great help in keeping their owner right side up when it makes one of those gigantic jumps; and when it lands upside down, or in some other way, its ability to kick is so great, that not more than one wriggle is needed to set things right. A flea's wings are mere scales, and of no use; but small and worthless as they are they tell the entomologist something about the proper classification of the insect. To the flea itself they have no value.

The whitefish in Lake Superior are decreasing yearly, according to fishermen. It is claimed that the dumping of ashes and clinkers into the lake has killed off large areas of the grassy patches on the bottom of the lake where the whitefish have fed. Between 1880 and 1905 the output of ashes, clinkers and furnace slag, not counting the sweepings of iron from the docks, has been 7,000,000 tons, which was dumped into Lake Superior. Fishermen all over Lake Superior tell the same story, that large clinkers come up in their gill nets when hauling in settings, indicating that the bottom of the lake is being covered with this manufactured scoria, the tendency of which is to destroy, or burn up, either by erosive action, or by chemical influences, all the grass in which there lived the minute organism upon which the whitefish subsisted.

Attention has recently been called to a movement, started this time by German students, to exclude foreigners from the Empire's universities. At times manufacturers, fearful of the competition that might ensue from training outsiders in German methods, have sought to have laws enacted that would either exclude foreigners, or make it so hard for them to enter, as practically to exclude them from the universities. Consul Brittain, of Kiel, says: "This year German students are again demanding an increase in matriculation and tuition fees for foreigners who attend German universities. They say preference should be shown the German students in assignment of places in dormitories and recitation-halls. After they have been accommodated they are willing that foreign students may take what places remain. German students are endeavoring to have all their universities unite in discriminating against foreign students. The number of foreign students at the German universities has increased rapidly. During the summer semester which has just closed there were 3,888 foreign students matriculated; last winter there were 3,893; last summer (1906) there were 3,173, and ten years ago the number was 3,196. The total number of all students matriculated at German universities was 64,942 for the summer semester 1906. Ten years ago the foreign students numbered 7.4 per cent. of the total number; at present 7.6 per cent. Of the 900 students studying medicine at Berlin, 100 are foreigners, or 1.6 per cent. At the Heidelberg University 16 per cent. of those studying medicine are foreigners, and of those studying mathematics and science 22 per cent. are foreigners."

GRINS AND CHUCKLES.

"You don't have many visitors out here," said Citiman, "do you?" "Oh, yes," replied Subbubs, "coming and going nearly every day." "Mostly women, I suppose." "Yes; servant girls."

"What are the dimensions of the lots out there?" "Forty feet front." "And how deep?" "I can't tell you that. I didn't succeed in sounding them. I put down a pole twenty feet long, but I didn't touch bottom."

"My, my, my!" said the little girl's grandmother, "you mustn't make so much fuss when you have your hair combed. When I was a little girl I had my hair combed three or four times every day." "Yes," said the child, pointing at the poor little gray knot on the back of the good old lady's head, "and see what you've got for it."

A poor old Irishman, with an old and battered cornet, was making night hideous one evening in a quiet Edinburgh square. A smart young "guardian of the peace" stepped up to him, and, in very peremptory tones, said: "Come, come, my man, you must stop that or accompany me." "Wid all the pleasure in loife, sor," replied Pat. "What are ye goin' to sing?"

A little elderly German who keeps a stationer's shop amuses and interests himself by making up stories about his customers and telling them to his family. "Dot young lady who has de pink cheeks, she be married soon, I t'ink," he announced one night. "Now, my Carl, you know nottings of her what-effer, is it not so?" and his wife tried to look as if she did not think him a wonderfully clever man. "It is like dis," said the stationer, solemnly: "I observe, and I know. At first she buy paper and envelopes de same; later she buy twice as more paper, and den five times as more paper as envelopes. So I know she is become betrothed. "And to-day," he said, beaming with pleasure, "to-day she buy only one half-dozen envelopes and five times as more paper; and when I tell her she get dem cheaper if she buy many, she say to me: 'I have no need of more, t'ank you.' So I know de friend he comes soon, and so comes de marriage on quickly."

THE WORTH MYSTERY

By JOHN SHERMAN.

Ned Hastings was a clerk in the Brainford Bank, and a young man who commanded the respect and confidence of all who knew him. In fact, no one stood higher in the estimation of the community than the young clerk.

Ned was well liked by his associates at the bank, and even the surly old janitor, who was not wont to speak well of any one, had a good word for Ned.

The young man's friends considered him a very lucky fellow, too, for it was understood that he was engaged to the heiress, Mabel Worth, whose uncle, Richard Worth, was the heaviest stockholder in the bank, and a reputed millionaire.

Pretty Mabel was an orphan, but her Uncle Richard, who was a childless old bachelor, had adopted her and meant to leave her all his fortune.

The rumored engagement of Ned Hastings and Mabel Worth was a correct report. The young people had loved each other for a long time, and they had plighted their troth, with the full consent of Mabel's Uncle Richard.

But strange to say, Ned Hastings and Richard Worth had never met.

This circumstance is easily explained. Richard Worth had been absent in Europe five years, and it was during his absence that Ned and Mabel met and loved.

Correspondents had, however, given Richard Worth such an excellent account of Ned, that when the young man, by letter, requested the permission of the millionaire to address his love suit to Mabel, his consent was given.

Richard Worth was very eccentric as well as very rich, and he had never had a picture taken in his life. So, not only had Ned never seen the old gentleman in person, but he had not even seen a photograph of him.

The time for the marriage of Mabel and Ned had been set, and Mr. Worth had written them from Paris that he should return to Brainford in time to be present at the wedding.

Later a cable message from her uncle informed Mabel that he would sail for New York on the Chancellor, a first-class transatlantic steamer of a popular line.

Mabel went to New York to meet the steamer, accompanied by an old gentleman who had formerly been Mr. Worth's business partner.

But the Chancellor had arrived the day before, and inquiry elicited the information that the same day Richard Worth had taken the evening train for Brainford.

Then the mystery began. Richard Worth had not reached his destination. On the contrary, it seemed that he had mysteriously disappeared. Mabel and Richard Worth's old business partner were filled with consternation when this became known to them.

They imagined at once that the missing man might have met with foul play, for the captain of the Chancellor, who was a friend of the old millionaire, stated that Mr. Worth had confided the fact to him that he carried a splendid collection of most valuable diamonds, which he had made in Europe, on his person, in a money-belt.

Mabel employed the best known detective to search for the missing man, and then she and Mr. Worth's old friend returned to Brainford.

Almost the first person to welcome Mabel besides Ned Hastings was one Ralph Warwick, an old suitor of the maiden, whom she had rejected a year before, and who stated that he had just returned from California.

Ralph Warwick seemed inclined to renew his suit for the hand of Mabel, and as he left her on the evening of her return from New York, and saw that Ned Hastings, who with himself had met the young lady at the depot, was indeed, as he had already heard, his successful suitor, Ralph's face assumed a strange expression, and he said:

"This is fate playing into my hands, for as sure as the heavens stand Ned Hastings was the man whom I saw in the gully that night."

Some days elapsed, and the detectives employed by Mabel

traced Richard Worth from a hotel in New York city to a depot, where he boarded the night train for Brainford.

But after the returned millionaire entered the train the trail ended. Where he had left it or how was a mystery.

Yet several days later, however, some hunters found the body of the missing man in a gully near the railway track, close to a water tank, in a gully where the train had stopped while the supply of water for the engine boiler was renewed.

Richard Worth had been foully murdered and robbed. It was the theory of the officers that the victim had been stabbed on the platform of the car and hurled off by the assassin, who then followed him, robbed the body and dragged it into the gully.

A heavy reward was at once offered for the detection of the assassin.

* * * * *

Some months before, upon arising one morning, Ned Hastings experienced a singular sensation of weariness, for which he could not account, for he had retired early, and had not fatigued himself the preceding day.

As he was dressing he found, to his astonishment, that his boots, which he had neatly polished just before retiring to his room for the night, were wet and stained with mud.

More than this, taking up the coat he had worn the day before, he found that, too, was wet, and so was his hat.

Yesterday had been cloudless. But going to the window and looking out, Ned saw that during the night a heavy rain had fallen.

He had no recollection of leaving his room the preceding night, but now he sank into a chair, and the conviction that he must have done so forced itself upon his mind.

"Good heavens! it must be that I have been walking in my sleep—that I am a somnambulist; but I never suspected such a thing before," thought Ned.

He was very much troubled by the reflection, and that very day he consulted a physician about the matter.

The medical man agreed with Ned that he must have walked in his sleep, advised more out-of-door exercise, less mental work, and a sedative to be taken upon retiring.

The young bank clerk placed himself in the hands of the physician, and thereafter he had no further experience of sleep walking, and thinking himself completely cured he soon ceased to think about the matter.

But on the morning following the day when Mabel Worth went to the city to meet her Uncle Richard, Ned Hastings awoke with a sense of fatigue again, for which there seemed to be no reason.

He at once asked himself in alarm if it could be possible that he had again become a somnambulist, and in a few moments he knew that such was the fact. As on the preceding occasion the condition of his boots and other articles of clothing told the story. Again he had walked in his sleep.

Then the young man calculated how long it had been since his last steep-walking experience and so fixed that date as well as the present one in his mind.

His last experience was on November 3d.

He tried to see if he could remember where he had been in his sleep, but he was only able to recall a memory of what seemed a terrible dream, without definite point or meaning.

As soon as the body of Richard Worth was found the remains were brought to his residence in Brainford, and Ned was there with Mabel, when the victim of the mysterious tragedy was brought home.

Alone, hand in hand, the betrothed lovers entered the darkened parlor to look upon the face of the dead.

We must recall the fact that Ned had never seen the face of the millionaire so far as he knew; but when he and Mabel then stood beside the remains and the set, white face was revealed to them, Ned Hastings started back with an exclamation of alarm and astonishment, and he said huskily:

"Merciful heaven! What can this mean? It is the face of my terrible dream!"

Ned trembled from head to foot, and there besides the dead, he then knew that he had seen that face before in the terrible

dream of his last night of sleep-walking, and suddenly all that dreadful vision which he had previously vainly tried to recall rushed back upon him in all its horror and awful distinctness.

The young man sunk into a chair and buried his face in his hands. He was almost overcome with emotion.

He remembered then that on the night of November 3d Richard Worth had met his death, and it was on that same night that he had walked in his sleep, and had the terrible dream which he now for the first time fully recalled.

And now he said in awful terror mentally:

"It was not a dream, but the actual reality. The memory of what occurred during the time that I last walked in my sleep has come back to me."

Mabel watched Ned Hastings in alarm and surprise.

"What is it? Tell me, Ned dear, what is it that so fearfully agitates you?" she asked.

"Only a fancied resemblance. I—I thought of one whom I used to once know when I saw your dead uncle's face," faltered Ned.

And then leaving Mabel sadly perplexed at his strange behavior he excused himself, and left the house as soon as he could.

Ned Hastings reached his room in a state of mind that was the next thing to insanity. Well might he have felt thus. He recalled the awful dream of the night of November 3d again.

He saw, as vividly as possible, the scene where the body of Richard Worth had been found, and which had since been described to him. He saw the murdered man and another shadowy form, and he saw himself there beside the dead.

The awful thought had entered the mind of Ned Hastings that in the somnambulistic state he had killed Richard Worth.

He recollected now that besides the belt of diamonds Mabel had told him that a certain diamond cross, with her uncle's name engraved on its back, which he always wore on his neck scarf, was missing, and he knew that he had seen that diamond cross on the night of November 3d.

Ned owned a little casket of foreign wood which had been given him by his mother, and in which he kept such little articles as he particularly treasured.

Trembling now, he unlocked that casket. For a moment he could not find courage to raise the lid, dreading what he might find there. But at last he opened the casket.

For a moment his heart seemed to stop beating. There was a diamond cross. It was the first thing his eyes rested upon when he opened the casket. The glittering gems seemed to flash upon him like accusing eyes. Breathlessly he turned the cross over, and there on the back he saw neatly engraved the name, "Richard Worth."

At that moment there came a gentle tap at the door, Ned turned his head, and as he did so the door opened and Mabel Worth stood before him.

Ned Hastings uttered a startled cry, and tried to close the casket; but in his haste to conceal the diamond cross he overturned the casket, and the accusing jewel fell at the feet of his promised bride.

"My uncle's diamond cross! How came it here? Speak, Edward, speak, and tell me!" she cried.

Ned Hastings shrank before her.

"Mabel," he uttered, in a tone of agony—"Mabel, I cannot tell you! Oh, the horror of it all! I think I shall go mad!"

She watched his face as he spoke, and, lifting his eyes to hers, he thought he saw an awful suspicion in her look. The reflection that the woman he loved might believe that he was the murderer of her uncle made him desperate, and he sprang forward and seized her hand, exclaiming:

"Mabel, I will tell you all!"

Then, while she listened breathlessly, he related what the reader already knows of his sleep-walking experiences and his terrible dream.

As he concluded, Mabel said:

"How can such a thing be?"

Did she doubt his truth? He could scarcely tell. They were at the window. At that moment he saw a man passing on the opposite side of the street. There was something that

seemed strangely familiar in the man's appearance, Ned thought. Then like a flash the truth dawned upon his mind.

"That is the very man I saw beside your murdered uncle in the gully!" exclaimed Ned, pointing.

Mabel looked in the direction he indicated, and she, too, saw the man. He turned his head while the eyes of the lovers were yet upon him, and both saw his face.

"Ralph Warwick!" exclaimed Mabel.

"I will prove my innocence to you, dearest, by convicting Ralph Warwick. Now I go to follow him. Do not lose faith in me, come what may," replied Ned.

As he spoke he darted from the room and gained the street.

Ralph Warwick was yet in sight.

Stealthily Ned followed him until he saw him enter the dwelling of a clairvoyant, who enjoyed considerable local celebrity. Ned remained watching the house until Warwick left it. Then he entered. The clairvoyant was under obligations to Ned, and he told the young man that Warwick was a firm believer in his powers, and frequently called to consult him. In conclusion the clairvoyant said:

"He is coming again to-night. He has made an appointment with me, and I am to go into a trance as usual and read the future for him."

"I will give you fifty dollars to allow me to personate you to-night when Ralph Warwick returns," said Ned.

The clairvoyant agreed, and that evening, made up exactly like him, Ned was at his house when Warwick arrived, and in an adjoining room he had Mabel and two detectives concealed, so that they could overhear all.

Ned had seen the clairvoyant go into his pretended trance several times, and he imitated him perfectly.

"Tell me what I shall do to make sure a certain secret of mine, which I wish to guard above all things, may not be found out?" asked Warwick, when Ned seemed to be in the trance.

"Remove the jewels from the place where you have hidden them. Secrete the diamonds somewhere else, and then leave the place," replied Ned, promptly.

"Your power is wonderful! Diamonds! Ah! you hit it at once," muttered Warwick.

Soon after that, when the "clairvoyant" came out of his trance, Warwick left the house. Of course he was followed by Ned and his concealed witnesses. The night was moonlight, and Warwick led them into the grounds of a deserted mansion. There he secured a spade, and went to the foot of a great tree near a broken marble pedestal. Throwing off his coat, Warwick began to dig. Ned and Mabel crept near with the two officers and concealed themselves behind the tree. Presently Warwick unearthed a box of some size. As he knelt to lift it out of the hole he had excavated, in their eagerness Mabel and Ned started forward, one on each side of the great tree.

Warwick heard them and leaped to his feet. But the succeeding moment Ned and the officers seized him, and the handcuffs were placed on his wrists.

Then the box was opened, and in it was found a blood-stained overcoat, which was afterward identified as belonging to Warwick, and Richard Worth's belt of diamonds.

Warwick was conveyed to prison, and a few days later he confessed his guilt. He had met the millionaire on the train, and as they were both on the platform of one of the coaches at the water station, he had stabbed the old gentleman and thrown him off, following himself and robbing his victim. Warwick had known the millionaire in other days, and in a conversation that took place before the murder he told the assassin about the diamonds he carried. Warwick had seen Ned at the scene of the murder, and decided, from his conduct, that he was walking in his sleep. The assassin had seen Ned pick up the diamond cross, and when he learned the young man was Mabel's suitor he decided to eventually direct suspicion to him, hoping that he might thus remove a rival.

In due time Warwick paid the penalty of his crime, and later on Ned and Mabel became man and wife.

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